

# UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL

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## APPLICATION ELEMENTS

*See MPEP chapter 600 concerning utility patent application contents.*

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1.  Fee Transmittal Form
2.  Specification, Claims & Abstract ..... [ Total Pages: 90 ]
3.  Drawing(s) (35 USC 113) ..... [ Total Sheets: 21 ]
4.  Oath or Declaration ..... [ Total Pages: 3 ]
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8.  Assignment Papers (cover sheet & document(s))
9.  37 CFR 3.73(b) Statement (*when there is an assignee*)  Power of Attorney
10.  English Translation Document (*if applicable*)
11.  Information Disclosure Statement (IDS)/PTO-1449  Copies of IDS Citations
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TITLE OF THE INVENTION

SIMULATION APPARATUS, SIMULATION METHOD AND COMPUTER-READABLE RECORDING MEDIUM HAVING SIMULATION PROGRAM RECORDED THEREON AS WELL AS DESIGNING SUPPORTING APPARATUS

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

## 1) Field of the Invention

This invention relates to a simulation apparatus, a simulation method and a computer-readable recording medium having a simulation program recorded thereon as well as a designing supporting apparatus suitable for use to check the workability when such working as assembly, disassembly or adjustment is performed for a subject designed by physical or mechanical characterization in a virtual three-dimensional space on a computer.

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2) Description of the Related Art

In recent years, as enhancement in performance of a computer for designing equipments and apparatus and popularization of a design technique which employs a three-dimensional CAD (Computer Aided Design) system have proceeded, a technique of performing inspection and examination of a design subject on a computer in a stage preceding to actual trial production of the design subject by constructing environment in which working such as assembly, disassembly or adjustment for the design subject is virtually performed on the computer has been

developed in various places.

Production of three-dimensional model data as designing operation in which such a three-dimensional CAD system as mentioned above is utilized usually requires  
5 much time, and upon designing, it is sometimes omitted to incorporate such parts as screws which are prescribed as standards as three-dimensional model data. In such an instance, it is sometimes difficult to incorporate omitted parts in the stage of trial production, and this  
10 makes a factor which causes a design miss.

Accordingly, upon production of three-dimensional model data mentioned above, it is required as essential working to incorporate such parts as screws which are prescribed as standards. Also it is required to  
15 virtually verify it on a computer prior to actual trial production whether or not working for such a part can actually be performed by a working element such as a tool or a hand of a human being.

Thus, a technique is available which provides  
20 environment in which a design subject is virtually produced by trial on a computer and allows a tool model or a human being model for performing working to be handled together with the design subject on the computer. By the technique, reviewing can be performed while working to  
25 be performed for the design subject is approximated to an actual working manner.

Such techniques which involve verification of

handling of a tool to be used to assemble or disassemble an apparatus/equipment in a virtual three-dimensional space on a computer or a human being who performs working as described above are disclosed in Japanese Patent  
5 Laid-Open No. 132428/1995, Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 185431/1996 and Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 147166/1997.

The technique disclosed in Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 132428/1995 relates to an equipment assembling process supporting apparatus. According to 10 the technique, steps when assembling and disassembling operations of an apparatus are performed are determined definitely and types of tools to be used for the individual steps and periods of use of the tools are determined 15 definitely such that the same tool is prevented from being used at a plurality of locations within the same period to reduce the quantity of tools to be used for assembly and disassembly of the equipment.

Meanwhile, the technique disclosed in Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 185431/1996 relates to a designing 20 supporting apparatus. According to the technique, models of parts and tools and/or persons are related to each other using a table for individual design subjects determined for individual assembly lines, and a part name 25 and an assembly line name are inputted to discriminate assembly in which a tool is used or assembly by hand and search for shapes of a tool and a hand or shapes of a part

and a hand as elements relating to working whereas a mounting position is inputted to discriminate whether or not assembly is possible from the point of view of human engineering.

5       The technique disclosed in Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 147166/1997 relates to an interference checking method and an interference checking apparatus for an assembly tool. According to the technique, all assembling locations of a design subject are detected and  
10      tools and metal fittings to be used for assembly are selected based on data outputted from a three-dimensional CAD system, and a list indicating a relationship between the assembly locations and the tools and metal fittings to be used is produced. Then, it is checked whether or  
15      not the tools and the parts interfere with each other when the tools are arranged at the assembly locations, and if some trouble occurs, then the assembling order is changed and then checking is performed repetitively.

For example, where the positions of holes formed  
20      in two parts which form a design subject are same, the holes are detected as holes to be used for performing assembling operations of the two parts, and tools and metal fittings to be used for such assembly are selected.

However, in such techniques for verification  
25      regarding handling of tools to be used and/or human beings who perform working when an apparatus/equipment in a three-dimensional space is to be assembled or

disassembled as described above, it is presupposed that they are applied to a subject as a result of completion of designing working, and no verification working is performed in the course of designing (in the designing step on the upstream).

In particular, if such verification is performed for the first time for a result of completed designing, then it is sometimes necessitated to modify the design for a large number of locations. Therefore, there is a subject to be solved in that the working load sometimes becomes higher than that in an alternative case wherein verification is performed in the designing process on the upstream and the designing working is proceeded by suitably modifying the design.

Further, in the technique disclosed in Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 132428/1995, a complicated setting work of relating models of parts and tools and/or human beings to each other in accordance with steps of each design subject must be performed in the designing stage by a designer. Accordingly, the technique disclosed in Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 132428/1995 has a subject to be solved also in that an unnecessary working time is assigned to a designer.

Also in the technique disclosed in Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 185431/1996, a complicated setting work of relating models of parts and tools and/or human beings in accordance with an assembly line for each design

subject must be performed in the designing stage by a designer. Accordingly, also the technique disclosed in Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 185431/1996 has a subject to be solved in that an unnecessary working time is assigned to a designer.

Further, in the technique disclosed in Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 147166/1997, although, for example, where the positions of holes formed in two parts which form a design subject are same, the holes are detected as holes to be used for performing assembling operations of the two parts based on data outputted from a three-dimensional CAD system, depending upon a design subject, the two holes may not necessarily be holes to be used for performing assembling working of the two parts.

Thus, the technique disclosed in Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 147166/1997 has a subject to be solved in that it does not correctly reflect assembling and disassembling works of an actual apparatus.

Further, in the technique disclosed in Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 147166/1997, since the relationship of assembling locations to tools and metal fittings to be used are determined uniquely and, when interference occurs upon assembly from the relationships, only the assembling order is taken into consideration, there is no room to select assembly parts or tools in accordance with working environment, and even a design subject which allows assembly depending upon selection of assembly

parts or tools is sometimes determined that it does not allow assembly.

## SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

5 It is an object of the present invention to provide  
a simulation apparatus, a simulation method and a  
computer-readable recording medium having a simulation  
program recorded thereon as well as a designing supporting  
apparatus by which a problem upon designing can be found  
in the designing stage on the upstream and the workability  
can be verified without imposing an unnecessary working  
time to a designer.

In order to attain the aspect of the present invention, there is provided a simulation apparatus for simulating, based on design information of a design model designed in a virtual three-dimensional space while one or more standard part models standardized in advance based on a specification model are arranged in the design model, working for the standard part models arranged in the design model, comprising a working means model information storage section for storing information regarding a working means model related to one or more standard part models for working the standard part models, a working means model information extraction section for referring, based on information regarding the standard part models arranged in a design model, to the working means model information storage section to extract

information regarding a working means model to be used to work the standard part models arranged in the design model, and a working simulation execution section for executing a simulation of the working for the standard part models with the working means model based on design information of the design model and the information regarding the working means model extracted by the working means model information extraction section.

According to another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a simulation method for simulating, based on data regarding a design model displayed in a virtual three-dimensional space and designed while one or more standard part models standardized in advance based on a specification model are arranged in the design model, workability according to a working means model used to work the standard part models arranged in the design model, comprising the steps of relating a working means model to one or more standard part models, acquiring the working means model related to the standard part models used upon designing of a design model, executing a simulation of working to be performed for the standard part models using the acquired working means model, and displaying a process of the execution of the simulation in a virtual three-dimensional space.

According to a further aspect of the present invention, there is provided a computer-readable recording medium having a simulation program recorded

thereon for causing, in order to cause a computer to execute, based on design information of a design model designed in a virtual three-dimensional space while one or more standardized standard part models are arranged  
5 in the design model, a simulation of working with a working means model used to work the standard part models arranged in the design model, the computer to implement a function of acquiring information regarding a working means model related to the standard part models used upon designing  
10 of a design model, a function of executing a simulation of working to be performed for the standard part models based on the acquired information of the working means model, and a function of displaying a process of the execution of the simulation in a virtual three-dimensional space.  
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According to a still further aspect of the present invention, there is provided a designing supporting apparatus, comprising a standard part model information storage section for storing information regarding one or more standard part models standardized in advance based  
20 on a predetermined specification model, and a designing supporting section for arranging one or more standard part models to perform supporting for designing a subject in a virtual three-dimensional space, the designing supporting means including an attribute information extraction section for referring to the standard part model information storage section to extract attribute  
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information of a working means model to be used to work  
the standard part models arranged in the subject designed  
in the virtual three-dimensional space, and a design data  
outputting section for outputting data regarding the  
5 subject designed in the virtual three-dimensional space  
and data regarding the attribute information extracted  
by the attribute information extraction section as design  
data.

With the simulation apparatus, the simulation  
10 method and the computer-readable recording medium having  
a simulation program recorded thereon as well as the  
designing supporting apparatus, information of working  
means models stored in the working means model storage  
section is related to standard part models by coordination  
15 of attribute information, and a working means model  
related to a standard part model used upon designing of  
a design model is acquired rapidly, and then a simulation  
of working to be performed for the standard part model  
can be executed using the acquired working means model.  
20 Consequently, during designing of an apparatus/equipment  
model in which a three-dimensional CAD system is used,  
there is no need of registering information regarding an  
actual tool into design data themselves in advance.  
Consequently, there is an advantage that the efficiency  
25 of modeling operation by a three-dimensional CAD system  
can be improved.

Further, even if, during designing of an

apparatus/equipment model in which a three-dimensional CAD system is used, design data are produced without performing such working as retrieval or relating operation of part models, since a simulation of working  
5 for standard part models arranged in the design data can be executed, a simulation can be performed also at an initial stage or in the source of designing. Consequently, there is an advantage that a simulation can be performed in the further upstream designing stage and  
10 leakage of interference checking of an apparatus or equipment after completion of designing can be prevented.

Since the workability can be verified without imposing an unnecessary designing time upon a designer through reduction of the frequency of doing over again  
15 of a part shape changing work or an assembling work of a three-dimensional CAD model, which provides a high working load, such as, for example, modification to a metal mold or variation of a shape of an actual part necessitated from a design change, the working efficiency  
20 can be raised remarkably.

The above and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the following description and the appended claims, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in  
25 which like parts or elements denoted by like reference symbols.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram illustrating an aspect of the present invention;

5 FIG. 2 is a functional block diagram of a simulation apparatus according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a diagrammatic view showing a hardware construction of the simulation apparatus of FIG. 2;

10 FIG. 4 is a diagrammatic view illustrating designing working by a three-dimensional CAD system shown in FIG. 2;

15 FIG. 5 is a diagrammatic view illustrating relating operation of standard part models stored in a standard part library and working means models stored in an actual model data storage section of the simulation apparatus of FIG. 2;

20 FIGS. 6 to 8 are schematic views each showing an example of a standard part model used in the simulation apparatus of FIG. 2 together with a reference position of it;

FIGS. 9A, 9B and 10A, 10B are schematic views showing different examples of a standard part model and a working means model used in the simulation apparatus of FIG. 2 together with reference positions of them;

25 FIGS. 11 and 12 are flow charts illustrating an example of operation of the simulation apparatus of FIG. 2;

FIG. 13A is a schematic view illustrating an example wherein it is detected by the simulation apparatus of FIG. 2 as a result of confirmation of a route along which a working means model arrives at a standard part model that interference occurs between them and FIG. 13B is a similar view but illustrating another example wherein it is detected by the simulation apparatus of FIG. 2 as a result of confirmation of a route along which a working means model arrives at a standard part model that interference does not occur between them;

FIG. 14 is a schematic view illustrating an example of an ideal working range amount of a working means model used in the simulation apparatus of FIG. 2;

FIG. 15 is a schematic view illustrating an example of a working range amount within which working can be performed using a working means model in the simulation apparatus of FIG. 2;

FIGS. 16 to 24 are schematic views showing different successive displaying manners displayed on a monitor as a result of simulation by the simulation apparatus of FIG. 2;

FIGS. 25 to 32 are schematic views showing different successive displaying manners displayed on the monitor as a result of simulation by the simulation apparatus of FIG. 2;

FIG. 33 is a flow chart illustrating a manner of changing information regarding working means models

(actual models) stored in the actual model data storage section of the simulation apparatus of FIG. 2;

FIG. 34 is a functional block diagram showing a computer as a designing supporting apparatus according to another embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG. 35 is a block diagram showing a hardware construction of the computer shown in FIG. 34.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

##### 10 a. Aspect of the Invention

First, an aspect of the present invention is described with reference to the drawings.

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a simulation apparatus according to an aspect of the present invention.

15 Referring to FIG. 1, the simulation apparatus is generally denoted at 1 and simulates, based on design information of a design model designed in a virtual three-dimensional space while one or more standard part models standardized in advance based on a specification model are arranged  
20 in the design model, working for the standard part models arranged in the design model. The simulation apparatus 1 includes a working means model information storage section 3, a working means model information extraction section 2 and a working simulation execution section 4.

25 The working means model information storage section 3 stores information regarding a working means model related to one or more standard part models for working

the standard part models.

The working means model information extraction section 2 refers, based on information regarding the standard part models arranged in a design model, to the 5 working means model information storage section 3 to extract information regarding a working means model to be used to work the standard part models arranged in the design model.

The working simulation execution section 4 executes 10 a simulation of the working for the standard part models with the working means model based on design information of the design model and the information regarding the working means model extracted by the working means model information extraction section 2.

15 The simulation apparatus 1 may be constructed such that the information regarding the standard part models arranged in the design model include attribute information of the working means model related to the standard part models, and the working means model 20 information extraction section 2 refers to the working means model information storage section 3 based on the attribute information to extract the information regarding the working means model.

The simulation apparatus 1 may other be constructed 25 such that the working means model information storage section 3 stores information of one ore more tool models which are models of actual tools and/or a hand model which

is a model of a hand of a worker as the information regarding the working means model.

The simulation apparatus 1 may otherwise be constructed such that the information regarding the working means model stored in the working means model information storage section 3 includes reference position information of the working means model when the working means model works the standard part models while the design information of the design model includes reference position information of the standard part models when the working means model works the standard part models, and the working simulation execution section 4 performs a simulation of a relationship in position/posture of the working means model to the standard part models based on the reference position information of the working means model and the standard part model.

In this instance, the simulation apparatus 1 may be constructed such that the working means model information storage section 3 stores information of a plurality of reference positions for any working means model which allows operation thereof in a plurality of different methods, and the working simulation execution section 4 executes a working simulation according to the plurality of operation methods.

The simulation apparatus 1 described above may further comprise an interference checking section for checking interference of the working means model while

the working simulation execution section 4 executes a simulation of the working for the standard part models with the working means model.

In this instance, the simulation apparatus 1 may  
5 be constructed such that the interference checking section checks interference of the working means model including a route along which the working means model arrives at one of the standard part models when the standard part model arranged in the design model is worked  
10 using the working means model.

Further, the simulation apparatus 1 may further comprise a workability evaluation coefficient storage section for storing, for the working means model included in the same attribute, a workability evaluation coefficient which makes a reference for evaluation of a workability of the working means model, and a workability evaluation section for evaluating the workability based on a result of execution of the working simulation by the working simulation execution section 4 and the workability evaluation coefficient stored in the workability evaluation coefficient storage section.  
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In this instance, the simulation apparatus 1 may be constructed such that the working means model information storage section 3 stores information of a plurality of reference positions for any working means model which allows operation thereof in a plurality of different methods and the working simulation execution  
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section 4 executes a working simulation according to the plurality of operation methods while the workability evaluation coefficient storage section stores a workability evaluation coefficient which makes a reference for evaluation of a workability for each of the 5 operation methods of the working means model, and the workability evaluation section evaluates the workability of the working means model for each of the working methods based on a result of execution of the working simulation 10 according to the working method and the workability evaluation coefficient stored for the operation method of the working means model in the workability evaluation coefficient storage section.

Further, the simulation apparatus 1 may be 15 constructed such that the working means model information storage section 3 stores information regarding a working condition necessary for working for the working means model as information regarding the working means model, and the working simulation execution section 4 executes 20 a working simulation based on the information regarding the working condition of the corresponding working means model stored in the working means model information storage section 3.

In this instance, the working means model 25 information storage section 3 may store information regarding working spaces necessary for working with the working means model as the information regarding the

working conditions of the individual working means model.

Furthermore, at least one of a fastening part model, an adjustment part model and a connector part model may be used for the standard part models.

5 Meanwhile, according to the present invention, a simulation method for simulating, based on data regarding a design model displayed in a virtual three-dimensional space and designed while one or more standard part models standardized in advance based on a specification model are arranged in the design model, workability according to a working means model used to work the standard part models arranged in the design model, comprises the steps of relating a working means model to one or more standard part models, acquiring the working means model related to the standard part models used upon designing of a design model, executing a simulation of working to be performed for the standard part models using the acquired working means model, and displaying a process of the execution of the simulation in a virtual three-dimensional space.

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20 In this instance, as the simulation of the working to be performed for the standard part models, a simulation of at least one kind of working from among assembling working, disassembling working, adjustment working and maintenance working for the standard part models may be performed.

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Further, where a tool is used to work the standard part models, the tool and a hand of a worker who uses the

tool may be used as the working means model to perform the simulation of the working. Meanwhile, where the standard part models are to be worked by a hand of a worker itself, the hand of the worker may be used as the working means model to perform the simulation of the working.

In those instance, when the process of execution of the simulation of the working is displayed in the virtual three-dimensional space, the working means model may be displayed in a shape suitable for an object of use in the virtual three-dimensional space.

Further, a process through which the working means model arrives at one of the standard part models which provides a subject position and a manner of working performed based on a condition defined in advance for the working means model may be displayed as the process of execution of the simulation of the working.

In this instance, after the working performed based on the condition defined in advance for the working means model is completed, a process through which the working means model is spaced away from the subject position based on a condition defined in advance for the standard part models may be displayed, and after the working means model is spaced by a predefined distance away from the subject position, the display of the working means model or the working means model and the standard part models may be erased.

Further, when interference occurs with the working

means model in a process of execution of the working to be performed for the standard part models with the working means model, an occurrence condition of the interference may be displayed.

On the other hand, according to the present invention, a computer-readable recording medium having a simulation program recorded thereon is constructed such that the simulation program causes, in order to cause a computer to execute, based on design information of a design model designed in a virtual three-dimensional space while one or more standardized standard part models are arranged in the design model, a simulation of working with a working means model used to work the standard part models arranged in the design model, the computer to implement a function of acquiring information regarding a working means model related to one or more standard part models used upon designing of a design model, a function of executing a simulation of working to be performed for the standard part models based on the acquired information of the working means model, and a function of displaying a process of the execution of the simulation in a virtual three-dimensional space.

Further, according to the present invention, a designing supporting apparatus comprises a standard part model information storage section for storing information regarding one or more standard part models standardized in advance based on a predetermined specification model,

and a designing supporting section for arranging one or more standard part models to perform supporting for designing a subject in a virtual three-dimensional space,  
the designing supporting means including an attribute  
5 information extraction section for referring to the standard part model information storage section to extract attribute information of a working means model to be used to work the standard part models arranged in the subject designed in the virtual three-dimensional  
10 space, and a design data outputting section for outputting data regarding the subject designed in the virtual three-dimensional space and data regarding the attribute information extracted by the attribute information extraction section as design data.

15 With the simulation apparatus, the simulation method and the computer-readable recording medium having a simulation program recorded thereon as well as the designing supporting apparatus, information of working means models stored in the working means model storage section is related to standard part models by coordination of attribute information, and a working means model related to a standard part model used upon designing of a design model is acquired rapidly, and then a simulation of working to be performed for the standard part model  
20 can be executed using the acquired working means model. Consequently, during designing of an apparatus/equipment  
25 model in which a three-dimensional CAD system is used,

there is no need of registering information regarding an actual tool into design data themselves in advance. Consequently, there is an advantage that the efficiency of modeling operation by a three-dimensional CAD system  
5 can be improved.

Further, even if, during designing of an apparatus/equipment model in which a three-dimensional CAD system is used, design data are produced without performing such working as retrieval or relating operation of part models, since a simulation of working for standard part models arranged in the design data can be executed, a simulation can be performed also at an initial stage or in the source of designing. Consequently, there is an advantage that a simulation can  
10 be performed in the further upstream designing stage and leakage of interference checking of an apparatus or equipment after completion of designing can be prevented.  
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Since the workability can be verified without imposing an unnecessary designing time upon a designer through reduction of the frequency of doing over again of a part shape changing work or an assembling work of a three-dimensional CAD model, which provides a high working load, such as, for example, modification to a metal mold or variation of a shape of an actual part  
20 necessitated from a design change, the working efficiency  
25 can be raised remarkably.

Furthermore, with the simulation apparatus

according to the aspect of the present invention described above, since attribute information of a working means model to be used to work can be included in information regarding a standard part model, even where the actual  
5 working means model is different because of a difference, for example, of an assembly line or a factory, there is no need of varying simulation conditions other than design data and the working means model, and the man-hours necessary for simulation working are reduced  
10 significantly. This provides another advantage that, since it is not necessary for the system to always store information regarding a large number of working means models, a simulation can be performed with a smaller amount of computer resources.

15 Further, with the simulation apparatus according to the aspect of the present invention described above, since information regarding the working means models stored in the working means model information storage section includes reference position information of the  
20 working means model side when the working means model works the standard part model and design information of the design model includes reference position information of the standard part model side when the working means model works the standard part model, it can be stored what  
25 tool is used in what positional relationship to the standard part model, and there is no need of getting aware of a type of a tool model to be used upon execution of

a simulation or a positional relationship of the tool model to the standard part model and an efficient simulation operation can be performed simply. This also contributes to improvement in quality of a design subject.

5        Further, although the actual workability is different whether a standard tool is used or a special tool is used or where the same tool is used in a different manner, the workability can be evaluated while taking such a difference in workability into consideration.  
10      Consequently, there is an advantage that evaluation of the workability can be made further conform to real working.

b. Embodiment of the Invention

Referring now to FIG. 2, there is shown a simulation apparatus according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. The simulation apparatus is generally denoted at 10 and is generally constructed such that it receives information (design information) regarding a design model (principally a structure model being designed) designed in a virtual three-dimensional space while part models are arranged by an external computer 30 as input file data and simulates working with working means models (for example, screwdrivers) which work standard part models (for example, screws) which form the design model.  
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In particular, the simulation apparatus 10 according to the present embodiment performs simulation

regarding such working as assembling working, disassembling working, adjustment working or maintenance working regarding a standard part model. In other words, through operation of the simulation apparatus 10, working  
5 for a standard part model by a working means model can be regenerated in an equivalent condition to that of actual working.

Here, the standard part model is a part model standardized in advance based on a predetermined standard  
10 model and includes, for example, a fastening part model (for example, a fastening screw and so forth) for use to secure part models to each other, an adjustment part model for use to finely adjust an arrangement relationship between part models and so forth, a connector part model  
15 (for example, a modular jack for a telephone cable and so forth) for use for connection of a part model such as, for example, a cable to an external terminal, and so forth.

Meanwhile, the working means model includes an actual tool model (screwdriver, spanner and so forth) for use to work such a standard part model as described above,  
20 a hand model to be used when a worker works directly with its hand, and so forth.

The computer 30 includes a three-dimensional CAD system 31 which functions as a designing supporting section, and a standard part library 32 which functions as a standard part model information storage section, and outputs design data regarding a design model designed in  
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a virtual three-dimensional space to the simulation apparatus 10.

The three-dimensional CAD system 31 performs supporting for designing a subject in a virtual three-dimensional space while arranging standard part models which will be hereinafter described. In other words, the three-dimensional CAD system 31 refers to the standard part library 32, which will be hereinafter described, based on operation information of an inputting device such as a keyboard or a mouse not shown which forms the external computer 30, and provides environment in which an arbitrary apparatus/equipment model can be designed in a virtual three-dimensional space.

In particular, in designing in which the three-dimensional CAD system 31 is used, in order to design an apparatus/equipment of a subject, modeling of various parts and arranging working of modeled parts (hereinafter referred to simply as part models) are performed or working of selectively and successively arranging appropriate ones of the standard part models stored in the standard part library 32 is performed.

For example, as seen in FIG. 4, under environment wherein the three-dimensional CAD system 31 operates on the computer 30, the three-dimensional CAD system 31 can perform designing working by first producing (modeling) part models 31A and 31B based on operation information of the inputting device such as the mouse (steps A1 and

A2) and then producing an assembly through a process of arranging standardized standard part models 31C so that they are assembled in a predetermined determined positional relationship to the part models 31A and 31B  
5 (step A3).

It is to be noted that design information (that is, three-dimensional CAD data) of the design model being designed by the computer 30 described above is suitably converted into file data (a design subject data file)  
10 (step A4) and fetched by the simulation apparatus 10 of the present embodiment.

More particularly, the simulation apparatus 10 can fetch such file data in the form of a file stored on a recording medium or can fetch file data inputted over a  
15 communication line or the like.

The standard part library 32 stores (defines) model data (three-dimensional CAD data such as the size and the shape) of part models which are used commonly in designing working by the three-dimensional CAD system 31 described  
20 above as model data of standard part models standardized in advance based on predetermined specification models.

For example, the standard part library 32 can store model data at least one of fastening part models such as screws, adjustment part models such as screws for  
25 adjusting arrangement relationships between part models which form apparatus/equipment models and connectors for connection between a housing and a cable as standard part

models.

Further, the standard part library 32 stores, in addition to model data of standard part models described above, attribute information (virtual tool information) of working means models related to individual standard part models, position information (reference position information) regarding a reference position (on the standard part model side) when a working means model works a standard part model.

More particularly, as seen in FIG. 5, the standard part library 32 stores, for example, model data of fastening part models 32-1 to 32-3 as standard part models, and further stores attribute information of tool models for working the fastening part models 32-1 to 32-3 and information of reference positions upon working with the tool models.

In this instance, as attribute information of tool models to be used to work the fastening part models 32-1 and 32-2, a "medium-size screwdriver" is stored, and as attribute information of a tool model to be used to work the fastening part model 32-3 which is larger in size than the fastening part models 32-1 and 32-2, a "large-size screwdriver" is stored.

It is to be noted that, for attribute information of tool models, virtual tool names (virtual tool information) corresponding to categories of a plurality of types of actually used tool models categorized taking

notice of a nature such as the size or the function like the "medium-size screwdriver" and "large-size screwdriver" mentioned above may be used.

Further, as seen in FIG. 6, the aforementioned reference position of a model 32A of a screw as a standard part model which is fastened by a Phillips screwdriver is a position 32A', and the standard part library 32 can store information of the reference position 32A' (reference position information) together with model data and the aforementioned attribute information of the model 32A of a screw.

Similarly, as seen in FIG. 7, the reference position of a model 32B of a screw as a standard part model which is fastened by a hexagon wrench is a position 32B' which makes a reference when the model 32A of a hexagon wrench works the model 32B, and the standard part library 32 can store information of the reference position 32B' (reference position information) together with model data and the aforementioned attribute information of the model 32B of a screw.

The computer 30 can refer, by operation of the three-dimensional CAD system 31, to the standard part library 32, in which information regarding such standard part models as described above is stored, to produce a design model. Information regarding standard part models which form the design data produced in this manner can include the attribute information and the reference

position information (stored in such a standard part library 32 as described above).

In other words, the three-dimensional CAD system 31 described above functions as an attribute information extraction section for referring to the standard part library 32 to extract attribute information of a working means model for working a standard part model arranged in a design model as a subject designed in a virtual three-dimensional space, and further has a function as a design data outputting section for outputting data regarding the subject designed in the virtual three-dimensional space and data regarding the attribute information extracted by the attribute information extraction section to the simulation apparatus 10.

In particular, design information to be delivered as file data to the simulation apparatus 10 may include data of standard part models arranged in the virtual three-dimensional space as well as attribute information of working means models related to the individual standard part models and position information (reference position information) which makes references (on the standard part model side) when the working means models work the standard part models.

Referring now to FIG. 3, the simulation apparatus 10 according to the present embodiment is formed from a computer which includes, as hardware components, an actual model data storage section 11, an evaluation

coefficient data storage section 12, an evaluation result data storage section 13, a monitor 14 which can display a manner of execution of a simulation, a keyboard 15 and a mouse 16 for performing an inputting operation, and a processing unit 20 which performs various processes to perform a working simulation according to the present embodiment.

The actual model data storage section 11 stores information regarding actual tool and/or hand models as working means models for working standard part models in a condition related to various standard part models stored in the standard part library 32 and thus functions as a working means model information storage section.

Further, the actual model data storage section 11 can store information regarding working means models as actual model data in a condition related to attribute information of the working means models. In particular, the processing unit 20 which will be hereinafter described can refer to the actual model data storage section 11 using attribute information as a key to extract information regarding a necessary working means model.

The attribute information of the working means models related to the working means models in the actual model data storage section 11 correspond to the attribute information of the working means models described above included as information regarding the standard part models so that the standard part models in the design data

and the working means models stored in the actual model data storage section 11 can be related to each other through the attributed information.

In other words, the processing unit 20 which will  
5 be hereinafter described can refer to the actual model data storage section 11 using attribute information of a working means model included in the information regarding a standard part model in design data as a key to extract information regarding the working means model  
10 to be used to work the standard part model.

Further, the actual model data storage section 11 can store, as information regarding a working means model described above, position information (reference position information) which makes a reference (on the  
15 working means model side) when a standard part model is to be worked in addition to model data of the working means model.

In particular, referring to FIG. 8, the reference position of an actual model 11A of a Phillips screwdriver corresponds to a position 11A' which makes a reference when the Phillips screwdriver as the actual model 11A performs working, and the actual model data storage section 11 can store also information of the reference position 11A' (reference position information) together  
25 with model data of the actual model 11A.

Further, the actual model data storage section 11 stores information regarding working conditions

necessary for working of individual working means models, for example, information regarding working spaces necessary upon working with the working means models.

For example, while a working means model such as  
5 a spanner requires, from a characteristic of working to be performed thereby, a working space of a predetermined magnitude therearound when it performs working, and the actual model data storage section 11 stores, as such information regarding working means models, ideal conditions which are ideal working conditions upon working, standard conditions which allow ordinary working, necessary and minimum conditions which allow the working means models to function, basic rotation units and so forth.

15 By the way, depending upon a nature of a working means model, working can be performed in a plurality of working methods, and a plurality of reference positions when working is performed may possibly be available corresponding to the working methods.

20 For example, an actual model 11B of a hexagon wrench can be applied to either of a working method wherein a shorter one 11B-1 of two long and short shanks 11B-2 and shank 11B-1 thereof is fitted (refer to ① of FIG. 9B) in a recess 32B' which makes a reference position to the standard part model 32B to perform working (refer to FIG. 9A or ② of FIG. 9B) and another working method wherein the longer shank 11B-2 thereof is fitted (refer

to ① of FIG. 10B) in the recess 32B' which makes a reference position to the standard part model 32B to perform working (refer to FIG. 10A or ② of FIG. 10B).

In this instance, the actual model data storage section 11 can store information regarding a reference position 11B'-1 when working is performed in such a manner as illustrated in FIGS. 9A and 9B using the actual model 11B of a hexagon wrench, and can store information regarding another reference position 11B'-2 when working is performed in such a manner as illustrated in FIGS. 10A and 10B.

In other words, the actual model data storage section 11 can store, for a working means model which can be operated in a plurality of methods as described above, information of the plurality of reference positions.

The evaluation coefficient data storage section 12 stores, for each of working means models included in the same attribute, a workability evaluation coefficient which makes a reference for evaluation of the workability of the individual working means model, and functions as a workability evaluation coefficient storage section.

In particular, the evaluation coefficient data storage section 12 stores a workability evaluation coefficient for evaluating the workability of each working means model with reference to the workability in ordinary working environment with a standard working means model based on attribute information related to each

standard part model in the standard part library 32 described above.

Further, for a working means model which can be operated in a plurality of different methods as described above, the evaluation coefficient data storage section 5 12 stores a workability evaluation coefficient which makes a reference for evaluation of the workability for each of the operation methods of the working means model.

The evaluation result data storage section 10 13 stores a workability evaluation result calculated based on an evaluation result of the workability for a result of a working simulation performed with a working means model and a workability evaluation coefficient stored in the evaluation coefficient data storage section 12 15 described above.

It is to be noted that the actual model data storage section 11, evaluation coefficient data storage section 12 and evaluation result data storage section 13 described above can be implemented by a recording medium as an external storage apparatus such as a disk apparatus, a CD-ROM or a floppy disk, or a remote data base connected over a line or the like.

Referring back to FIG. 2, the processing unit 20 includes a processor, a memory and so forth not shown as hardware components, and includes, as functional components, a general controller 21, a part/tool information management section 22, a simulation

calculation execution section 23, an interference checking section 24, and a evaluation result management section 25 and can perform various processes necessary to execute a working simulation according to the present embodiment.

It is to be noted that functions as the general controller 21, part/tool information management section 22, simulation calculation execution section 23, interference checking section 24 and evaluation result management section 25 of the processing unit 20 described above can be implemented by fetching a simulation program from a computer-readable recording medium such as, for example, a CD-ROM or a disk apparatus and causing the simulation program to operate on the processing unit 20.

The general controller 21 generally controls entire processing performed by the processing unit 20. Particularly, the general controller 21 accepts operation instruction information or the like from the keyboard 15 or the mouse 16, requests the other function sections 22 to 25 to perform necessary processing or accesses data of the function sections 22 to 25 based on design information from the computer 30 described above inputted thereto as file data, and controls the monitor 14 to display thereon results of various processes or a result of execution of an operation instruction from the keyboard 15 or the mouse 16.

The part/tool information management section 22

receives, through the general controller 21, attribute information of a working means model related to a standard part model arranged in a design model in a virtual three-dimensional space, which forms design information from the computer 30 described above, and refers to the actual model data storage section 11 to extract working means model data corresponding to the attribute.

More particularly, the part/tool information management section 22 refers to an address conversion table (not shown) or the like provided to establish relation between attribute information from the general controller 21 and address information of the actual model data storage section 11 in which corresponding working means model data are stored.

In this manner, for example, information regarding a working means model of a storage area for working means models (in this instance, for example, tool sets 110A to 110C and so forth) corresponding to the "medium-size screwdriver" as attribute information (virtual tool information) can be extracted (refer to FIG. 5)

Consequently, the part/tool information management section 22 can manage extracted information regarding a working means model (including model data and reference position information) and information regarding a standard part model from the general controller 21 (including model data and reference position information) in a related condition to each other based on attribute

information, thereby achieving enhancement in efficiency of information management regarding standard parts and actual parts.

Accordingly, the general controller 21 and the part/tool information management section 22 described above function as a working means model information extraction section which refers to the actual model data storage section 11 based on information regarding a standard part model which forms design information of a design model to extract information regarding the working means model to be used to work the standard part model arranged in the design model.

In this instance, the information regarding a standard part model arranged in a design model can include attribute information of a working means model related to the standard part model, and the part/tool information management section 22 refers to the actual model data storage section 11 based on the attribute information to extract a working means model.

The simulation calculation execution section 23 performs various calculation processes for simulating working for a standard part model arranged in a design model designed in a virtual three-dimensional space. Accordingly, by calculation of the simulation calculation execution section 23, the position of a working means model is moved in a virtual three-dimensional space to regenerate operation when the working means model works

a standard part model.

In particular, by calculation of the simulation calculation execution section 23 described above, three-dimensional CAD data as an execution process or an execution result of a working simulation in a virtual three-dimensional space can be produced, and by using the three-dimensional CAD data produced by the calculation of the simulation calculation execution section 23, the general controller 21 can control the monitor 14 to display a manner of the working simulation.

In other words, the general controller 21 and the simulation calculation execution section 23 function as a working simulation execution section which executes a simulation of working with a working means model for a standard part model described above based on design information of a design model inputted as file data and information regarding a working means model extracted by the part/tool information management section 22.

Further, the general controller 21 and the simulation calculation execution section 23 described above can execute a working simulation based on information regarding a working condition described above for each of the working means models stored in the actual model data storage section 11.

For example, when a working simulation with a working means model such as, for example, a spanner which requires, from a nature of working, a working space of

a predetermined magnitude therearound when it performs working, the general controller 21 and the simulation calculation execution section 23 can extract an ideal condition, a standard condition, a necessary least condition, a basic rotation unit or the like for working with the working means model from the actual model data storage section 11 and execute a working simulation based on the conditions.

Further, the general controller 21 and the simulation calculation execution section 23 execute, for a working means model such as a hexagon wrench which can be operated in a plurality of methods, working simulations according to the plurality of operation methods in a priority order set in advance.

The interference checking section 24 checks, while the general controller 21 and the simulation calculation execution section 23 described above execute a simulation of working with a working means model for a standard part model, interference of the working means model with any other part model.

In other words, the interference checking section 24 checks, based on three-dimensional CAD data produced by the general controller 21 and the simulation calculation execution section 23 described above, in a process of working performed by the working means model for the standard part model, whether or not the working means model interferes with any other part model.

The evaluation result management section 25 performs calculation processing for evaluation of the workability based on a result of execution of a working simulation by the simulation calculation execution section 23 and a workability evaluation coefficient inputted through the general controller 21 and stored in the evaluation coefficient data storage section 12. A function as a workability evaluation section is implemented by the evaluation result management section 25 and the general controller 21.

In other words, the evaluation result management section 25 calculates data for evaluation of the workability with reference to standard working environment based on a result of execution of a working simulation of a working means model by the simulation calculation execution section 23 and a workability evaluation coefficient stored in the evaluation coefficient data storage section 12, and stores a result of the calculation into the evaluation result data storage section 13.

Further, the evaluation result management section 25 calculates, for a working means model for which working can be performed in a plurality of operation methods such as, for example, a hexagon wrench, data for evaluation of the workability for each of the operation methods of the working means model based on a result of execution a working simulation by the operation method and a

workability evaluation coefficient stored for the operation method of the working means model in the evaluation coefficient data storage section 12.

In the processing unit 20 of the simulation apparatus 10 according to the embodiment of the present invention having the construction described above, data (design information) regarding a design model in a virtual three-dimensional space designed while a standard part model standardized in advance is arranged based on a predetermined specification model is inputted as file data from the computer 30, and a simulation of working for the standard part model is performed and a result of the simulation is displayed on the monitor 14.

In particular, the general controller 21 and the simulation calculation execution section 23 can confirm, through a simulation of working performed with a working means model for the standard part model arranged in the design model based on the file data, whether or not there is a route along which the working means model can reach the standard part model without any interference and whether or not a working range amount necessary for the working means model to perform working is assured.

It is to be noted that the actual model data storage section 11 of the simulation apparatus 10 stores attribute information regarding the working means model in a related condition to attribute information of the working means model to be used for the standard part model which forms

the design model.

Consequently, information regarding the standard part model in the design information which forms the file data (that is, attribute information of the working means model to be used to work the standard part model) can be related to attribute information of the working means model stored in the actual model data storage section 11. Consequently, the working means model and the standard part model are related to each other.

By such relating condition between the standard part model and the working means model as described above, when the simulation apparatus 10 starts a working simulation for the standard part model used upon designing of the design model, it rapidly acquires information regarding the working means model for the standard part model which makes a subject and executes a simulation of working to be performed for the standard part model, and a process of execution of the simulation is displayed on the monitor 14.

In particular, referring to FIG. 11, the processing unit 20 of the simulation apparatus 10 receives an instruction based on an operation of the keyboard 15 or the mouse 16 regarding design data of a subject by the three-dimensional CAD system 31 fetched from the computer 30 and executes a working simulation of the standard part model of the design model (step B1).

More particularly, the processing unit 20 of the

simulation apparatus 10 designates a certain standard part model from among part models arranged in a design model in a virtual three-dimensional space by means of the keyboard 15 or the mouse 16 and refers, by the 5 part/tool information management section 22 thereof, to the actual model data storage section 11 to rapidly extract a working means model to be used to work the thus designated standard part model, and then executes a working simulation.

10 Here, the general controller 21 extracts attribute information of the working means model to be used to work the standard part model designated in such a manner as described above from within the file data fetched from the computer 30, and the part/tool information management 15 section 22 refers to the actual model data storage section 11 based on the extracted attribute information to acquire information regarding the working means model included in the attribute described above (step B2).

20 It is to be noted that, if the information regarding the working means model acquired by the part/tool information management section 22 represents that a plurality of working means models corresponding to the attribute described above are available, the general controller 21 instructs the simulation calculation 25 execution section 23 to perform calculation processing for executing a working simulation of the working means models successively in the descending order of the

priority degree based on a priority order set for the working means models.

For example, if the attribute information of the standard part model arranged in the design model is the "medium-size screwdriver" (refer to FIG. 5), then the general controller 21 refers to the actual model data storage section 11 using the attribute information as a key to fetch information regarding the tool set 110A.

In this instance, the standard part model arranged in the design model has information "medium-size screwdriver" as tool information (virtual tool information) to be used, and the part/tool information management section 22 acquires the tool set 110A as information regarding an actual tool model (actual model) based on the information "medium-size screwdriver" from the actual model data storage section 11.

On the other hand, the general controller 21 instructs the simulation calculation execution section 23 to start calculation processing for execution of a working simulation beginning with, from between two screwdrivers which forms the tool set 110A, that screwdriver which has a higher priority degree as a screwdriver to be used based on the priority order set in advance (for example, beginning with that one of the two screwdrivers which has a longer shank).

It is to be noted that the priority degree mentioned above can be set based on evaluation coefficients

regarding the workability of individual working means models of the same attribute stored in the evaluation coefficient data storage section 12 such that a working means model having a higher workability has a higher priority degree set thereto.

Further, also when a plurality of methods of use are available for a single working means model, the general controller 21 instructs the simulation calculation execution section 23 to perform calculation processing for execution of a working simulation successively for the methods of use in the descending order of the priority degree based on the priority order set in advance for the individual methods of use of the working means model.

Also in this instance, the priority degrees mentioned above can be set based on workability evaluation coefficients set for the operation methods of the same working means model stored in the evaluation coefficient data storage section 12 such that a working means model having a higher workability has a higher priority degree set thereto.

Further, the general controller 21 receives the information regarding the working means model acquired by the part/tool information management section 22 and controls the monitor 14 so that the working means model for which a working simulation should be performed may be displayed together with the design model described

above on the monitor 14 (step B3). Consequently, as three-dimensional CAD data to be processed in the simulation apparatus 10, the data of the working means model are handled simultaneously with the design data.

5 Meanwhile, when the simulation calculation execution section 23 receives the instruction to perform calculation processing for execution of a simulation from the general controller 21, it calculates a route for arrival route confirmation from the reference position  
10 information of the subject standard part model in the virtual three-dimensional space and the reference position information of the working means model (step B4).

15 It is to be noted that, as described above, the reference position information of the standard part model described above is included in the file data as the design data inputted from the computer 30 while the reference position information of the working means model is included in the information regarding the working means model fetched by the part/tool information management  
20 section 22 referring to the actual model data storage section 11, and the simulation calculation execution section 23 calculates a route for arrival route confirmation based on the two kinds of reference position information described above.

25 After the route for arrival route confirmation is calculated, the simulation calculation execution section 23 calculates a unit movement distance (minimum distance)

to be used for movement of the working means model along the route from the model data of the standard part model and the working means model (step B6).

Then, by calculation of the simulation calculation execution section 23, position/posture data of the working means model after the working means model moves toward the standard part model along the route for arrival route confirmation by the unit movement distance calculated in such a manner as described above (step B7).

In other words, the general controller 21 and the simulation calculation execution section 23 perform a simulation of relationships in position and posture of the working means model to the standard part model based on the reference position information of the working means model and the reference position information of the standard part model.

The interference checking section 24 performs interference checking processing for the three-dimensional CAD data after the movement by the unit movement distance described above. In particular, the interference checking section 24 checks based on the three-dimensional CAD data produced by the calculation of the simulation calculation execution section 23 whether or not interference occurs between the working means model and some other part model or standard part model (steps B8 to B10).

In other words, the interference checking section

24 checks interference of the working means model including the route along which the working means model arrives at the standard part model when the standard part model arranged in the design part is to be worked using  
5 the working means model.

In particular, until the interference checking section 24 detects that interference of the working means model with any model other than the subject standard part model occurs or the working means model arrives at the  
10 reference position of the standard part model or else interference of the working means model with the standard part model occurs, the simulation calculation execution section 23 moves the position of the working means model described above toward the standard part model while it causes the monitor 14 to display thereon a condition of  
15 the movement of the working means model through the general controller 21 (through the NO routes of steps B8 to B10 to step B11).

In short, a simulation is executed including a route  
20 along which a working means model arrives at a standard part model arranged in an apparatus/equipment model when the working means model is used to work the standard part model, or in other words, an arrival route for adjusting the working means model to the working position of the  
25 standard part model.

Particularly, making use of the fact that information regarding the standard part model includes

such reference position information as indicated by, for example, reference symbol 32A' shown in FIG. 6 and information regarding the working means model includes such reference position information as indicated by, for 5 example, reference symbol 11A' in FIG. 8, the reference position of the working means model is moved toward the reference position of the standard model while interference checking is performed in accordance with the necessity.

10 Through the process that the process of the simulation is displayed on the monitor 14 under the control of the general controller 21 while calculation of the simulation calculation execution section 23 and interference checking of the interference checking 15 section 24 are performed (step B11), confirmation of the arrival route along which the working means model when working is started arrives at the position of the standard part model is simulated while a manner in which the working means model moves step by step by the unit movement 20 distance is displayed on the monitor 14.

In other words, in the process wherein the model 110A-1 of a screwdriver as the working means model arrives at the model 32-1 of a screw as the standard part model, if the model 110A-1 of a screwdriver interferes with 25 another part model 33, the interference checking section 24 outputs a signal representing this, thereby allowing discrimination that there is a trouble in working as a

result of occurrence of interference.

If a result of the working simulation proves that, for example, the model 110A-1 of a screwdriver arrives at the model 32-1 of a screw without any interference with the other part model 33 as seen in FIG. 13B, then occurrence of interference is not detected by the interference checking section 24. However, if interference of the model 110A-1 of a screwdriver occurs with the other part model 33 in the process wherein the model 110A-1 of a screw arrives at the model 32-1 of a screw as seen in FIG. 13A, then the interference checking section 24 detects this occurrence of interference.

It is to be noted that FIGS. 16 to 19 illustrate an example of a displaying manner on the monitor 14 upon confirmation of an arrival route of a model (working means model) 43 of a screwdriver to be used to work a model (standard part model) 42 of a screw arranged on a design model 41.

In particular, in FIGS. 16 to 19, there is illustrated an example wherein it is displayed on the monitor 14 that the model (working means model) 43 of a screwdriver moves step by step by the unit movement distance following the route for arrival route confirmation without interfering with any other part model (refer to FIG. 16 to FIG. 17 or FIG. 17 to FIG. 18) until it arrives at the position of the model 42.

Here, if a result of the interference checking

performed by the interference checking section 24 while the working means model is moved toward the subject standard part model as described above proves that interference of the working means model with any other model than the standard part model occurs, then the interference condition which occurs after the movement of the working means model is displayed on the monitor 14 under the control of the general controller 21 (from the YES route of step B8 to step B12).

In other words, when interference of the working means model occurs in the process of execution of working to be performed for the standard part model by the working means model, the monitor 14 displays the interference occurrence condition.

In this instance, when the simulation calculation execution section 23 confirms the arrival route of the working means model, if rotation of the working means model around a particular axis is permitted (the YES route of step B13), then the simulation calculation execution section 23 produces three dimensional CAD data after rotation of the position of the working means model by a predefined amount around the particular axis by calculation (step B14) and then calculates the unit movement distance together with the route for arrival route confirmation newly (steps B4 and B6).

For example, where rotation around a particular axis is defined when the reference positions of a standard

part model and a working means model are to be adjusted to each other like a spanner, even if the arrival route cannot be confirmed when such rotation is not performed, it is only required that the arrival route can be confirmed  
5 based on some other rotation condition.

Further, when the arrival route of the working means model is confirmed by the simulation calculation execution section 23, if rotation of the working means model around the particular axis is not permitted (the NO route of step B13), then if the working means model has some other method of use (the YES route of step B15), then the simulation calculation execution section 23 uses the reference position of the working means model according to the method of use (step B16) to calculate  
10 the unit time distance together with the route for arrival route confirmation newly (steps B4 and B6).  
15

After the unit movement distance is calculated together with the route for arrival route confirmation newly in such a manner as described above, the general controller 21 and the simulation calculation execution section 23 execute a simulation for arrival route confirmation again to move the working means model toward the standard part model on the monitor 14 while the interference checking section 24 performs interference checking as described above (the closed loop of step B7, the NO routes of steps B8 to B10 and step B11).  
20  
25

It is to be noted that, if it is discriminated in

step B15 described above that the working means model has no other method of use, then the general controller 21 checks the attribute information of the standard part model described above to discriminate whether or not there  
5 is some other available working means model (step B17).

If there is some other available working means model, then the general controller 21 controls the monitor 14 to display the working means model and executes a simulation for arrival route confirmation including  
10 interference checking similar to that described hereinabove (from the YES route of step B17 to steps B4 to B11). However, if there is no other available working means model, then the general controller 21 records the process till then and reports it as a simulation result  
15 through a printing apparatus not shown or the monitor 14 (steps B18 and B19).

By the way, if it is discriminated in step B9 or step B10 described above that the working means model arrives at the position of the standard part model without  
20 suffering from interference with any other part model (when it is detected that the working means model arrives at the standard part model or it is detected that interference between the working means model and the standard part model 42 occurs), then the general  
25 controller 21 controls the monitor 14 to display the condition after the movement (step B20; refer to FIG. 19), and the evaluation result management section 25

calculates a workability evaluation coefficient regarding the arrival route confirmation and records a result of the calculation into the evaluation result data storage section 13 (step B21).

5        When confirmation of the route along which the working means model moves from the remote position to the position of the standard part model is performed as described above and a route along which the working means model can arrive at the position of the standard part model  
10      without suffering from interference is confirmed successfully, a simulation of working to be performed for the standard part model with the working means model can be executed subsequently to confirm the working range amount.

15      In particular, when an actual working means such as a tool works a standard part to perform working such as assembly working, disassembly working or adjustment working of a subject, a working space other than the configuration of the tool may be required depending upon  
20      the nature of the tool model. In this instance, it is required to confirm whether or not there is such a working space around the standard part model arranged in the design model.

25      For example, when a model 51 of a bolt as a standard part model is to be worked using a model 52 of a spanner as seen in FIG. 14, as a working rage of the model 52 of a spanner, it is ideal to assure a working space over 360

degrees (refer to reference symbol S). However, such a situation possibly occurs that, due to interference with some other part, the working range can be assured only over a range of, for example, 240 degrees (refer to reference symbol R) or 120 degrees (refer to reference symbol Q). In this manner, the model 52 of a spanner has a nature that the workability thereof varies depending upon the magnitude of the working range.

In other words, even if a tool model can arrive at the position of a subject standard part model without any interference, it is not guaranteed that the tool model can be used appropriately. Therefore, after it is checked in steps B20 and B21 described above that the predetermined position is reached, if necessary, also checking of the workability of the tool model is performed.

It is to be noted that whether or not checking of the workability of the tool model is required may be set using the keyboard 15 or the mouse 16 or may be determined by the general controller 21 from data regarding the standard part model and/or data regarding the working means model.

Here, if confirmation of the working range is not required when working is performed for the standard part model by the working means model as seen in FIG. 12 (the NO route of step B22), then a result of the simulation regarding the arrival route confirmation described above

is reported (step B19), but if confirmation of the working range is required (the YES route of step B22), then the simulation calculation execution section 23 calculates a minimum unit working amount (movement amount, rotation amount or the like) based on the working range data (step 5 B23).

For example, with such a model 52 of a spanner as shown in FIG. 14, the minimum working range when it works a model 51 of a bolt is a range of a turning angle of 60 degrees (refer to reference symbol P), and where the model 10 52 is used as a working means model, the simulation calculation execution section 23 calculates a working amount of turning motion of 60 degrees as a result of calculation of the minimum unit working amount mentioned 15 hereinabove.

After the simulation calculation execution section 23 calculates the minimum unit working amount in this manner, the simulation calculation execution section 23 produces, by calculation, position/posture data of the 20 position/posture after the working means model is operated by the minimum unit working amount calculated in such a manner as described above (step B24).

When the working means model is operated based on the calculation of three-dimensional CAD data by the 25 simulation calculation execution section 23, the interference checking section 24 checks based on the three-dimensional CAD data produced by the calculation

of the simulation calculation execution section 23 whether or not interference of the working means model with some other part model or standard part model occurs (step B25).

5        If interference of the working means model with any other model than the subject standard part model does not occur when the working means model is operated by the minimum unit working amount as described above, then the design model is displayed together with the working means  
10      model after the movement on the monitor 14. Thereafter, if interference of the working means model with some other part model does not occur, the processing of performing interference checking while the working means model is successively moved step by step by the minimum unit  
15      working amount and displaying the models after the movement on the monitor 14 is repeated in a similar manner.

In other words, until it is detected by the interference checking section 24 that interference of the working means model with any model other than the subject standard part model occurs or it is detected that a tool ideal working condition is satisfied without suffering from interference, the working means model is successively operated step by step by the minimum unit working amount described above and a manner of the movement by the working means model is displayed on the monitor 14 (the closed loop including step B24, the NO route of step B25, the NO route of step B26 and step 27).

Here, if a result of interference checking performed by the interference checking section 24 while the working means model is operated in such a manner as described above proves that interference of the working means model with any other model than the standard part model occurs, then the interference condition which occurs after the movement of the working means model is displayed on the monitor 14 under the control of the general controller 21 (from the YES route of step B25 to step B28).

In other words, when interference with the working means model occurs in the process of execution of working to be performed for the standard part model with the working means model, the monitor 14 displays the interference occurring condition.

In this instance, if a working amount with which no interference occurs has been confirmed by a working operation of the working means model performed in the virtual three-dimensional space, or in other words, if such a working condition as at least satisfies the requirement that no interference occurs even if the working means model is operated with the minimum unit working amount has been confirmed by the processing in steps B24 to B27 described above, then the simulation calculation execution section 23 calculates a working range amount over which working can be performed taking the basic working unit amount of the working means model

itself into consideration (from the YES route of step B29 to step B37).

Similarly, even if no interference occurs when the working operation of the working means model is performed  
5 in the ideal working condition in the virtual three-dimensional space, the simulation calculation execution section 23 calculates a working range amount over which working can be performed taking the basic working unit amount of the working means model itself into  
10 consideration (from the YES route of step B26 to step B37).

More particularly, a model 52 of a spanner which works a model 51 of a bolt shown in FIG. 15 can work only within a range within which no interference thereof with another part model 53 occurs, and can be turned within  
15 a range of 90 degrees in the maximum (refer to an angle  $\alpha$  in FIG. 15). In this instance, since the basic turning unit of the tool is 60 degrees, the simulation calculation execution section 23 can calculate a working range of 60 degrees (refer to an angle  $\beta$  in FIG. 15) as the minimum  
20 unit working amount described above.

When the working range amount is calculated in such a manner as described above, the evaluation result management section 25 calculates a working evaluation coefficient for the working range amount and registers  
25 a result of calculation into the evaluation result data storage section 13 (step B38). Then, the general controller 21 reports the process till then (for example,

the result of confirmation of the arrival route of the working means model, the result of confirmation of calculation of the working range amount and the result of evaluation of the workability) as a simulation result through the printing apparatus not shown, the monitor 14 and so forth (step B19).

It is to be noted that, in this instance, the working means model whose working range amount has been confirmed is displayed on the monitor 14 such that the original arrival route is traced reversely from the position of the standard part model worked by the working means model so that the working means model is successively spaced away by a condition defined in advance (for example, by the unit movement distance mentioned hereinabove), and after the working means model is spaced away by a predefined distance from the position of the subject, the display of the working means model is erased.

For example, if a simulation of working wherein a model 42 of a screw as a standard part model arranged on a design 41 is worked using a model 43 of a screwdriver as a working means model as seen in FIG. 16 is executed, then as a result of the simulation, such a series of manners as seen in FIGS. 17 to 24 can be displayed on the monitor 14.

In particular, the model 43 of a screwdriver displayed as a working means model to be used to work the model 42 of a screw as a standard part model successively

moves by each unit distance along the calculated route for arrival route confirmation (refer to FIG. 17 to FIG. 18, or FIG. 18 to FIG. 19) until it reaches the position of the model 42 of a screw (refer to FIG. 19).

5        Here, in order to perform confirmation of a working range, a simulation of working of the model 42 of a screw with the model 43 of a screwdriver is performed subsequently to confirm a working range amount necessary for the working with the working means model (FIG. 20).

10      In other words, the monitor 14 displays, as an execution process of the simulation of working, a process until the model 43 of a screwdriver arrives at the model 42 of a screw which provides a subject position and a manner of working which is performed by the model 43 of 15 a screwdriver based on a condition defined in advance.

After the working is completed, the model 43 of a screwdriver moves away from the position of the model 42 of a screw tracing the original route (FIGS. 21 to 23). After the model 43 of a screwdriver moves by a predetermined distance away from the position of the model 20 42 of a screw, the display of the model 43 is erased (FIG. 24).

In other words, after working performed by the model 25 43 of a screwdriver based on the condition defined in advance is completed, the monitor 14 first displays that the model 43 of a screwdriver moves away from the model 42 of a screw as the subject position based on the

condition defined in advance for the model 42 of a screw, and then erases the display of the model 43 of a screwdriver after the model 43 of a screwdriver moves by the predefined value away from the subject position.

5 It is to be noted that, in this instance, if a simulation of working to remove the model 42 of a screw with the model 43 of a screwdriver is performed, then the display of the model 43 of a screwdriver and the model 42 of a screw is erased after the model 43 of a screwdriver  
10 moves by the predefined distance away from the subject position.

By the way, if, upon working by the working means model described above, interference occurs upon movement of the working means model by the minimum unit working amount and the particular condition which satisfies the requirement is not reached (the NO route of step B29), then if rotation of the working means model around a particular axis is permitted upon route confirmation (the YES route of step B30), then the simulation calculation execution section 23 produces, by calculation, position/posture data for rotating the working means model around the particular axis, and interference checking is performed while the working means model is operated in a similar manner as described above (from step 20 B31 to step B24).

In particular, for example, for the model 51 of a bolt which is worked by such a model 52 of a spanner as

described hereinabove with reference to FIG. 14, it is necessary to confirm a plurality of positional relationships to the model 52 of a spanner as a working means model. This is because, for example, even if interference occurs when the reference position of the model 51 of a bolt and the reference position of the model 52 of a spanner are adjusted to each other, interference does not sometimes occur when the model 52 of a spanner is in a positional relationship turned by 60 degrees.

Further, even if rotation of the working means model around the particular axis is not permitted upon route confirmation described above (the NO route of step B30), if the working means model has another available method of use (the YES route of step B32), the reference position according to the available method of use is used to calculate a minimum unit working amount newly, and interference checking is performed while the working means model is operated to perform confirmation of the working range amount (from step B33 to step B23).

Further, also when the working means model described above has no other available method of use (the NO route of step B32), if the subject standard part model has another available working means model (the YES route of step B34), then the working means model is read out by the part/tool information management section 22 and displayed on the monitor 14 so that a simulation for arrival route confirmation is executed newly (from step

B36 to step B3).

When the working means model described above has no other available method of use (the NO route of step B32), if no other working means model is available (the NO route of step B34), then the general controller 21 records the process till then and reports it as a simulation result through the printing apparatus not shown or the monitor 14 (steps B35 and B19).

Accordingly, where a plurality of working means models are related to a standard part model in such a manner that, for example, as described hereinabove with reference to FIG. 5, the tool set 110A including the two drives 110A-1 and 110A-2 are related as a working means model with the standard part model 32-1, a working simulation is performed not using the two screwdrivers simultaneously, but an order in use of the two screwdrivers is determined depending upon a priority order defined in advance.

For example, if the screwdriver 110A-1 having a shorter shank in the tool set 110A shown in FIG. 5 has a higher priority order, then a simulation is executed first using the screwdriver 110A-1 having a shorter shank. If a result of the simulation reveals that interference occurs, for example, as seen in FIG. 13A and it is determined that the screwdriver 110A-1 cannot be used, then the other screwdriver 110A-2 having a longer shank in the tool set 110A of FIG. 5 is used to perform a

simulation again.

If a result of the simulation reveals that no interference occurs as seen, for example, in FIG. 13B, then it is determined that assembly of the standard part model 32-1 as a fastening part is possible, and this is displayed on the monitor 14. Further, a result of workability evaluation calculated by the evaluation result management section 25 where the longer screwdriver 110A-2 having a lower priority degree is stored into the evaluation result data storage section 13.

While examples of operation of a working simulation of a working means model where principally a tool model such as a screwdriver or a hexagon wrench is used as the working means model are described in detail above with reference to FIGS. 11 and 12, a working simulation similar to that described above can be performed also in a case wherein working is performed for a standard part model using a model of a hand of a human being.

In particular, when working is performed for a standard part model by a hand of a worker itself, the hand of the worker is set to a working means model, and a simulation of working can be executed to confirm a relative magnitude of the working means model relative to the other part models, a working range or a working method.

In this instance, that a standard part model is related to information of a plurality of tool models

corresponds to that the standard part model is related to hand models of different sizes, and that a tool model possibly has a plurality of methods of use corresponds to that a hand model has a plurality of available methods of use such as grasping and nipping.

In this instance, when the execution process of the simulation of the working is displayed in the virtual three-dimensional space on the monitor 14, the working means model having a shape suitable for its object of use is displayed in the virtual three-dimensional space.

For example, if a simulation of working wherein a hand model 62 as a working means model is used for a standard part model 61 arranged on a design model to grasp and pull the standard part model 61 is executed in a similar manner as described above, then such forms as shown in FIGS. 25 to 30 are displayed as a result of the simulation on the monitor 14.

In particular, in order to perform a simulation wherein the standard part model 61 having a reference position 61' is grasped and pulled using the hand model 62 displayed in such a manner as shown in FIG. 25, a middle point 62-1 between the reference position 62A' of the forefinger model 62A and the reference position 62B' of the thumb model 62B which are components of the hand model 62 is calculated.

Further, the simulation calculation execution section 23 moves the hand model 62 by calculation of the

three-dimensional CAD data so that the middle point 62-1 described above may approach the reference position 61' of the standard part model 61 side until the position of the middle point 62-1 comes to the reference position 61' as seen from FIGS. 25 and 26.

Further, the simulation calculation execution section 23 defines in advance a calculation technique of three-dimensional CAD data for performing working of the hand model 62 to grasp, and moves the reference positions 62A' and 62B' defined on the hand model 62 side toward the reference position of the standard part model 61 as seen in FIG. 27 (refer to the closed loop of steps B7 to B11 of FIG. 11).

It is to be noted that, when a working means model having a movable portion like the hand model 62 is moved nearer, position/posture data can be produced using, for example, a technique of inverse kinematics.

Further, if, in the process wherein the reference positions 62A' and 62B' of the hand model 62 are moved toward the reference position of the standard part model 61, interference occurs between the forefinger model 62A and the standard part model 61 and between the thumb model 62B and the standard part model 61 without causing interference between the hand model 62 and any other model than the standard part model 61, then an arrival route until the hand model 62 described above grasps the standard part model 61 can be confirmed (refer to steps

B20 and B21 of FIG. 11).

Further, by pulling the standard part model 61 while the standard part model 61 is grasped by the hand model 62 as seen in FIG. 29, a working range amount can be confirmed. Then, when the position of the hand model 62 is spaced away by the prescribed distance from the original position of the standard part model 61 as seen in FIG. 30, the display of the hand model 62 on the monitor 14 can be erased.

It is to be noted that the predefined value for erasing such a working means model displayed on the monitor 14 as described above can be determined from a relationship between a constant stored in the actual model data storage section 11 depending upon the working means model and a manner of use of the working means model and the size of a parallelepiped or spherical member or a like member which contains the subject standard part model and other design subject data present in the virtual three-dimensional space.

Also when a hand model 63 as a working means model performs a simulation of working to push the standard part model 61, the simulation apparatus 10 performs basically similar processing to that for the working simulation with a tool model described above and the monitor 14 can display a process of the working simulation in such a manner as seen in FIGS. 31 and 32.

In particular, the simulation calculation

execution section 23 defines in advance a calculation technique of three-dimensional CAD data for the hand model 63 to push a standard part model as shown in FIGS. 31 and 32 so that the working of folding a thumb model 63B having a reference position 63B' and pushing the standard part model 61 with a forefinger model 63A having a reference position 63A' can be regenerated in the virtual three-dimensional space.

It is to be noted that, when a working simulation is performed using the hand model described above as a working means model, shape data corresponding to various working manners such as grasping and pulling, pushing and gripping are stored in the actual model data storage section 11 so that suitable shape data (or size data) of the hand model can be selectively used from among the stored working manners in accordance with a working manner used.

In this instance, it may be possible, for example, to use data only of a finger tip as model data, to use data of a hand from the finger tips to the wrist as model data or to use the hand from the finger tips to the forearm as model data.

The information regarding the working means models (actual models) stored in the actual model data storage section 11 of the simulation apparatus 10 in the present embodiment can be modified suitably, for example, in accordance with a flow chart of FIG. 33 in response to

an operation of the keyboard 15 or the mouse 16.

First, if the general controller 21 of the simulation apparatus 10 receives an instruction based on an operation of the keyboard 15 or the mouse 16 to change  
5 the information regarding a working means model stored in the actual model data storage section 11 (step S1), then it displays virtual tool information as attribute information so that it may receive a selection instruction of the virtual tool information which makes a subject of  
10 the change.

In particular, if data (design data) of a design model which makes a subject of the simulation has already been read in (the YES route of step S2), then the general controller 21 controls the monitor 14 so that attribute information of working means models to be used to work all standard part models used in the design model may be displayed as virtual tool information in the form of a list on the monitor 14 (step S3) and receives a selection instruction of the virtual tool information which makes  
15 a subject of the change (step S4).

On the other hand, when data of the design model which makes a subject of the simulation has not been read in as yet (the NO route of step S2), then the general controller 21 controls the monitor 14 so that all  
25 attribute information regarding the working means models stored in the actual model data storage section 11 may be displayed as virtual tool information in the form of

a list on the monitor 14 and receives a selection instruction of the virtual tool information which makes a subject of the change (step S5).

Then, if a working means model or models other than working means models related at present to the virtual tool information designated as a subject of the modification in step S4 or S5 described above are present under the control of the system (the YES route of step S6), then the general controller 21 controls the monitor 14 to display those working means models which can be changed under the control of the system (step S7) and receives a selection instruction of a working means model to be related newly (step S8).

On the other hand, if no working means model other than working means models related at present to the virtual tool information designated as a subject of the change is present under the control of the system (the NO route of step S6), then the general controller 21 receives an instruction of a location of the working means model to be related newly (step S9) and then performs processing of moving or copying the data under the control of the system (step S10).

Then, new relating operation of the virtual tool information described above to the working means model selectively designated in step S8 or S9 as described above is performed (step S11).

In this manner, with the simulation apparatus 10

according to the present embodiment, as information regarding the working means models stored in the actual model data storage section 11 and the standard part models are related to each other by coordination of attribute 5 information, a working means model related to a standard part model used upon designing of a design model can be acquired rapidly and a simulation of working to be performed for the standard part model can be executed using the acquired working means model. Consequently, 10 during designing of an apparatus/equipment model in which a three-dimensional CAD system is used, there is no need of registering information regarding an actual tool into design data themselves in advance. Consequently, there is an advantage that the efficiency of modeling operation 15 by a three-dimensional CAD system can be improved.

Further, even if, during designing of an apparatus/equipment model in which a three-dimensional CAD system is used, design data are produced without performing such working as retrieval or relating 20 operation of part models, since a simulation of working for standard part models arranged in the design data can be executed, a simulation can be performed also at an initial stage or in the source of designing. Consequently, there is an advantage that a simulation can 25 be performed in the further upstream designing stage and leakage of interference checking of an apparatus or equipment after completion of designing can be prevented.

Since the workability can be verified without imposing an unnecessary designing time upon a designer through reduction of the frequency of doing over again of a part shape changing work or an assembling work of 5 a three-dimensional CAD model, which provides a high working load, such as, for example, modification to a metal mold or variation of a shape of an actual part necessitated from a design change, the working efficiency can be raised remarkably.

10 Further, since notice is taken of standard parts, there is no need of updating a database or tables regarding working means models or standard part models for each design subject, and the load of preparations to a person who performs a simulation is reduced.

15 Furthermore, since attribute information of a working means model to be used to work can be included in information regarding a standard part model, even where the actual working means model is different because of a difference, for example, of an assembly line or a factory, 20 there is no need of varying simulation conditions other than design data and the working means model, and the man-hours necessary for simulation working are reduced significantly. This provides another advantage that, since it is not necessary for the system to always store 25 information regarding a large number of working means models, a simulation can be performed with a smaller amount of computer resources.

Further, since information regarding the working means models stored in the actual model data storage section 11 includes reference position information of the working means model side when a working means model works 5 a standard part model and design information of a design model includes reference position information of the standard part model side when the working means model works the standard part model, it can be stored what tool is used in what positional relationship to the standard 10 part model, and there is no need of getting aware of a type of a tool model to be used upon execution of a simulation or a positional relationship of the tool model to the standard part model and an efficient simulation operation can be performed simply. This also contributes 15 to improvement in quality of a design subject.

In particular, while it matters whether or not a tool can arrive at a subject article and, even if it can arrive, it is important that it can arrive by a simple method, with the simulation apparatus 10 according to the 20 present embodiment, cumbersome position designation for confirming the above on a computer can be eliminated.

Further, although the actual workability is different whether a standard tool is used or a special tool is used or where the same tool is used in a different manner, the workability can be evaluated while taking such 25 a difference in workability into consideration. Consequently, there is an advantage that evaluation of

the workability can be made further conform to real working.

It is to be noted that the present invention is not limited to the embodiment described above and can be carried out in various forms without departing from the scope and spirit of the present invention.

For example, as seen in FIG. 34, a single computer 10A may have the functions of the computer 30 as a designing supporting apparatus (including the functions of the three-dimensional CAD system 31 and the standard part library 32) and the functions as the simulation apparatus 10 in the embodiment described above.

In this instance, the computer 10A includes, as hardware components thereof, as seen in FIG. 35, an actual model data storage section 11, an evaluation coefficient data storage section 12, an evaluation result data storage section 13, a monitor 14, a keyboard 15 and a mouse 16 similar to those in the embodiment described above, and further includes a processing unit 20A and a standard part library 32.

The processing unit 20A includes a part/tool information management section 22, a simulation calculation execution section 23, an interference checking section 24 and an evaluation result management section 25 similar to those in the embodiment described above, and further includes a general controller 21A and a three-dimensional CAD system 31 (refer to FIG. 34).

The general controller 21A may perform memory accessing to acquire three-dimensional CAD data produced by the three-dimensional CAD system 31 as design data for executing a working simulation.

5 In the computer 10A having such a construction as described above, design data designed by the three-dimensional CAD system 31 can be delivered to the general controller 21 or the simulation calculation execution section 23 on a memory (not shown) without converting them  
10 into a file. Consequently, similar advantages to those of the embodiment described above can be achieved.

Further, the simulation processing which is performed subsequently in the embodiment described above when arrival route confirmation of a working simulation  
15 or confirmation of a working range amount proves that interference of a working means model with any other part model than a standard part model occurs is not limited to such simulation processing as described hereinabove with reference to FIGS. 11 and 12, and one of a process  
20 of searching for another route, another process of searching for another tool or a further process of searching for a different manner of use may be selectively performed.

Further, while, in the embodiment described above,  
25 where a tool is used to work a standard part model, only the tool is displayed as a working means model, the manner of display is not limited to this, and a tool and a hand

of a worker who uses the tool may be determined as a working means model to execute a simulation of working in order to confirm the magnitude, working range or working method of the working means model. According to this, a  
5 simulation which takes also a working space of the hand of the worker who uses the tool into consideration can be performed when compared with the case of the embodiment described above. Consequently, a simulation can be made further conform to actual working.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A simulation apparatus for simulating, based on design information of a design model designed in a virtual three-dimensional space while one or more standard part models standardized in advance based on a specification model are arranged in the design model, working for the standard part models arranged in the design model, comprising:

10 a working means model information storage section for storing information regarding a working means model related to one or more standard part models for working the standard part models;

15 a working means model information extraction section for referring, based on information regarding the standard part models arranged in a design model, to said working means model information storage section to extract information regarding a working means model to be used to work the standard part models arranged in the design model; and

20 a working simulation execution section for executing a simulation of the working for the standard part models with the working means model based on design information of the design model and the information regarding the working means model extracted by said working means model information extraction section.

25 2. A simulation apparatus as claimed in claim 1,

wherein the information regarding the standard part models arranged in the design model include attribute information of the working means model related to the standard part models, and said working means model information extraction section refers to said working means model information storage section based on the attribute information to extract the information regarding the working means model.

3. A simulation apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein said working means model information storage section stores information of one or more tool models which are models of actual tools and/or a hand model which is a model of a hand of a worker as the information regarding the working means model.

4. A simulation apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the information regarding the working means model stored in said working means model information storage section includes reference position information of the working means model when the working means model works the standard part models while the design information of the design model includes reference position information of the standard part models when the working means model works the standard part models, and said working simulation execution section performs a simulation of a relationship in position/posture of the working means

model to the standard part models based on the reference position information of the working means model and the standard part models.

5           5. A simulation apparatus as claimed in claim 1,  
further comprising an interference checking section for  
checking interference of the working means model while  
said working simulation execution section executes a  
simulation of the working for the standard part models  
10          with the working means model.

15         6. A simulation apparatus as claimed in claim 5,  
wherein said interference checking section checks  
interference of the working means model including a route  
along which the working means model arrives at one of the  
standard part models when the standard part model arranged  
in the design model is worked using the working means  
model.

20         7. A simulation apparatus as claimed in claim 2,  
further comprising a workability evaluation coefficient  
storage section for storing, for the working means model  
included in the same attribute, a workability evaluation  
coefficient which makes a reference for evaluation of a  
25         workability of the working means model, and a workability  
evaluation section for evaluating the workability based  
on a result of execution of the working simulation by said

working simulation execution section and the workability evaluation coefficient stored in said workability evaluation coefficient storage section.

5           8. A simulation apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein said working means model information storage section stores information regarding a working condition necessary for working for the working means model as information regarding the working means model, and said  
10          working simulation execution section executes a working simulation based on the information regarding the working condition of the corresponding working means model stored in said working means model information storage section.

15          9. A simulation apparatus as claimed in claim 8, wherein said working means model information storage section stores information regarding working spaces necessary for working with the working means model as the information regarding the working conditions of the  
20          individual working means model.

25          10. A simulation apparatus as claimed in claim 4, wherein said working means model information storage section stores information of a plurality of reference positions for any working means model which allows operation thereof in a plurality of different methods, and said working simulation execution section executes

a working simulation according to the plurality of operation methods.

11. A simulation apparatus as claimed in claim 7,  
5 wherein said working means model information storage section stores information of a plurality of reference positions for any working means model which allows operation thereof in a plurality of different methods and said working simulation execution section executes a  
10 working simulation according to the plurality of operation methods while said workability evaluation coefficient storage section stores a workability evaluation coefficient which makes a reference for evaluation of a workability for each of the operation  
15 methods of the working means model, and said workability evaluation section evaluates the workability of the working means model for the each of the working methods based on a result of execution of the working simulation according to the working method and the workability evaluation coefficient stored for the operation method of the working means model in said workability evaluation coefficient storage section.  
20

12. A simulation apparatus as claimed in claim 1,  
25 wherein at least one of a fastening part model, an adjustment part model and a connector part model is used for the standard part models.

13. A simulation method for simulating, based on data regarding a design model displayed in a virtual three-dimensional space and designed while one or more standard part models standardized in advance based on a specification model are arranged in the design model, workability according to a working means model used to work the standard part models arranged in the design model, comprising the steps of:

10 relating a working means model to one or more standard part models;

acquiring the working means model related to the standard part models used upon designing of a design model;

15 executing a simulation of working to be performed for the standard part models using the acquired working means model; and

displaying a process of the execution of the simulation in a virtual three-dimensional space.

20

14. A simulation method as claimed in claim 13, wherein, as the simulation of the working to be performed for the standard part models, a simulation of at least one kind of working from among assembling working, 25 disassembling working, adjustment working and maintenance working for the standard part models is performed.

15. A simulation method as claimed in claim 13,  
wherein, where a tool is used to work the standard part  
models, the tool and a hand of a worker who uses the tool  
are used as the working means model to perform the  
simulation of the working.

5

16. A simulation method as claimed in claim 13,  
wherein, where the standard part models are to be worked  
by a hand of a worker itself, the hand of the worker is  
used as the working means model to perform the simulation  
of the working.

10

17. A simulation method as claimed in claim 15,  
wherein, when the process of execution of the simulation  
of the working is displayed in the virtual three-  
dimensional space, the working means model is displayed  
in a shape suitable for an object of use in the virtual  
three-dimensional space.

15

20

18. A simulation method as claimed in claim 16,  
wherein, when the process of execution of the simulation  
of the working is displayed in the virtual three-  
dimensional space, the working means model is displayed  
in a shape suitable for an object of use in the virtual  
three-dimensional space.

25

19. A simulation method as claimed in claim 13,

wherein a process through which the working means model arrives at one of the standard part models which provides a subject position and a manner of working performed based on a condition defined in advance for the working means model are displayed as the process of execution of the simulation of the working.

20. A simulation method as claimed in claim 19, wherein, after the working performed based on the condition defined in advance for the working means model is completed, a process through which the working means model is spaced away from the subject position based on a condition defined in advance for the standard part models is displayed, and after the working means model is spaced by a predefined distance away from the subject position, the display of the working means model or the working means model and the standard part models is erased.

20 21. A simulation method as claimed in claim 13, wherein, when interference occurs with the working means model in a process of execution of the working to be performed for the standard part models with the working means model, an occurrence condition of the interference is displayed.

22. A computer-readable recording medium having a

simulation program recorded thereon for causing, in order to cause a computer to execute, based on design information of a design model designed in a virtual three-dimensional space while one or more standardized standard part models are arranged in the design model,  
5 a simulation of working with a working means model used to work the standard part models arranged in the design model, the computer to implement:

10 a function of acquiring information regarding a working means model related to one or more standard part models used upon designing of a design model;

15 a function of executing a simulation of working to be performed for the standard part models based on the acquired information of the working means model; and

15 a function of displaying a process of the execution of the simulation in a virtual three-dimensional space.

23. A designing supporting apparatus, comprising:

20 a standard part model information storage section for storing information regarding one or more standard part models standardized in advance based on a predetermined specification model; and

25 a designing supporting section for arranging one or more standard part models to perform supporting for designing a subject in a virtual three-dimensional space;

25 said designing supporting means including an attribute information extraction section for referring

to said standard part model information storage section  
to extract attribute information of a working means model  
to be used to work the standard part models arranged in  
the subject designed in the virtual three-dimensional  
5 space, and a design data outputting section for outputting  
data regarding the subject designed in the virtual  
three-dimensional space and data regarding the attribute  
information extracted by said attribute information  
extraction section as design data.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

The invention provides a simulation apparatus by which a problem upon designing can be found in the designing stage on the upstream without imposing an unnecessary working time to a designer. The simulation apparatus includes a working means model information storage section for storing information regarding working means models related to standard part models for working the standard part models, a working means model information extraction section for referring to the working means model information storage section based on information regarding a standard part model arranged in a design model to extract information regarding a working means model to be used to work the standard part model arranged in the design model, and a working simulation execution section for executing a simulation of the working for the standard part model with the working means model based on design information of the design model and the extracted information regarding the working means model, and checks the workability of working for a subject designed in a virtual three-dimensional space on a computer.

**FIG. 1**

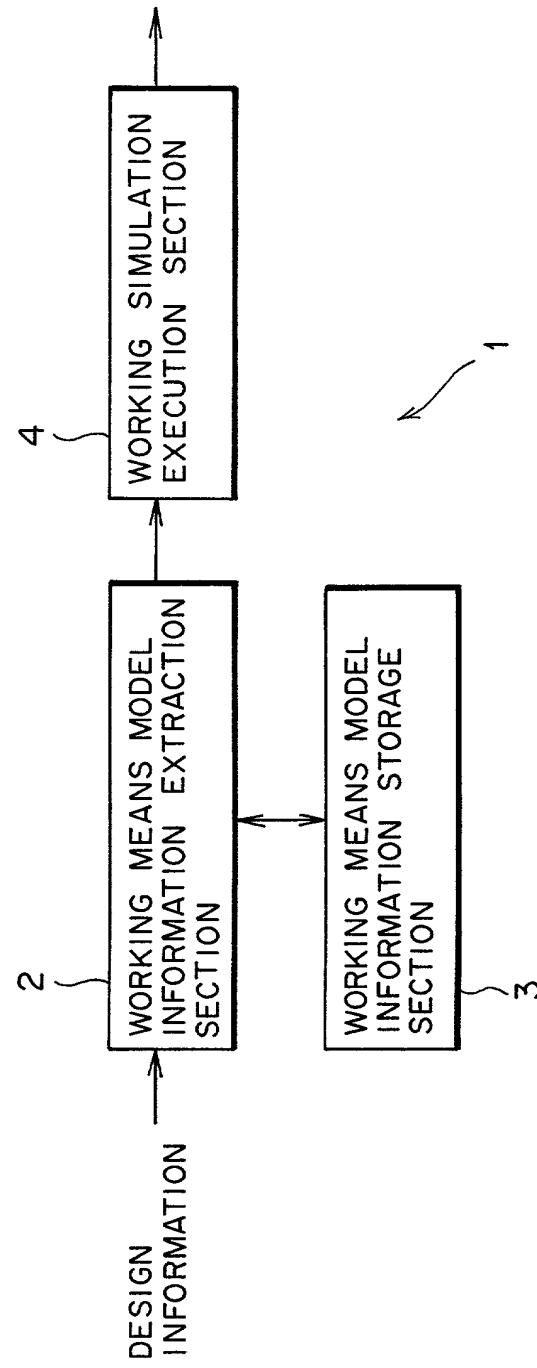


FIG. 2

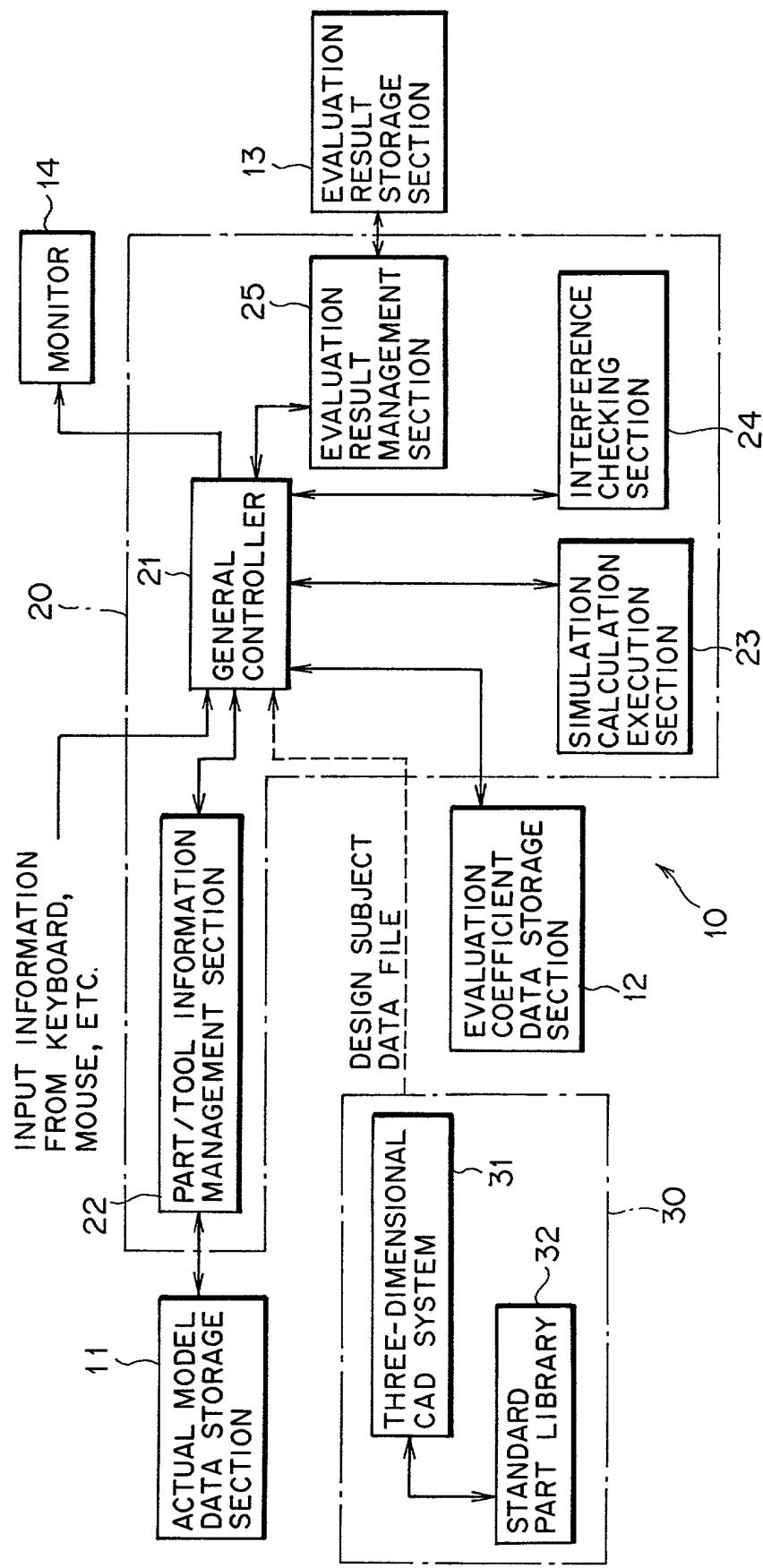
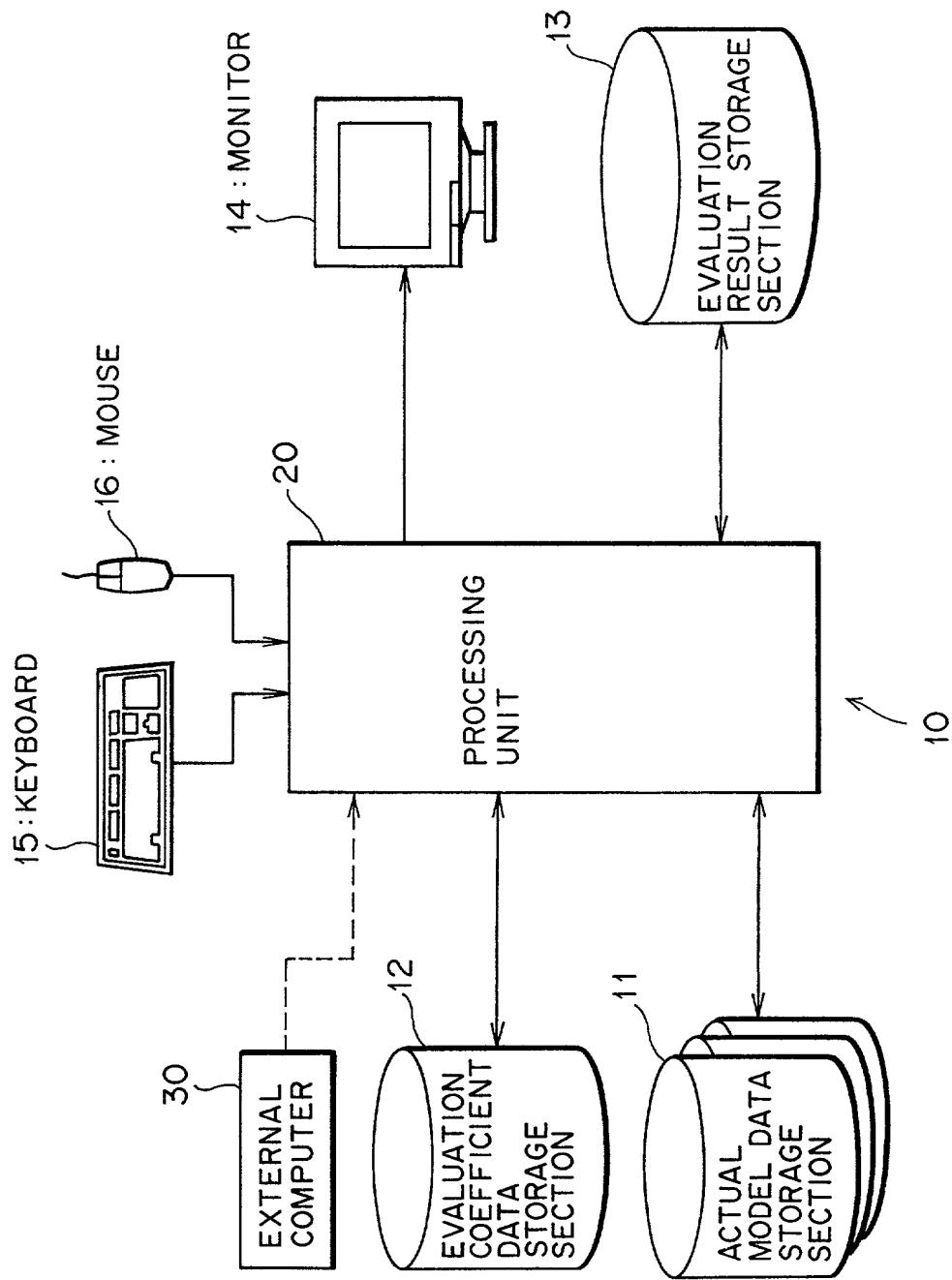
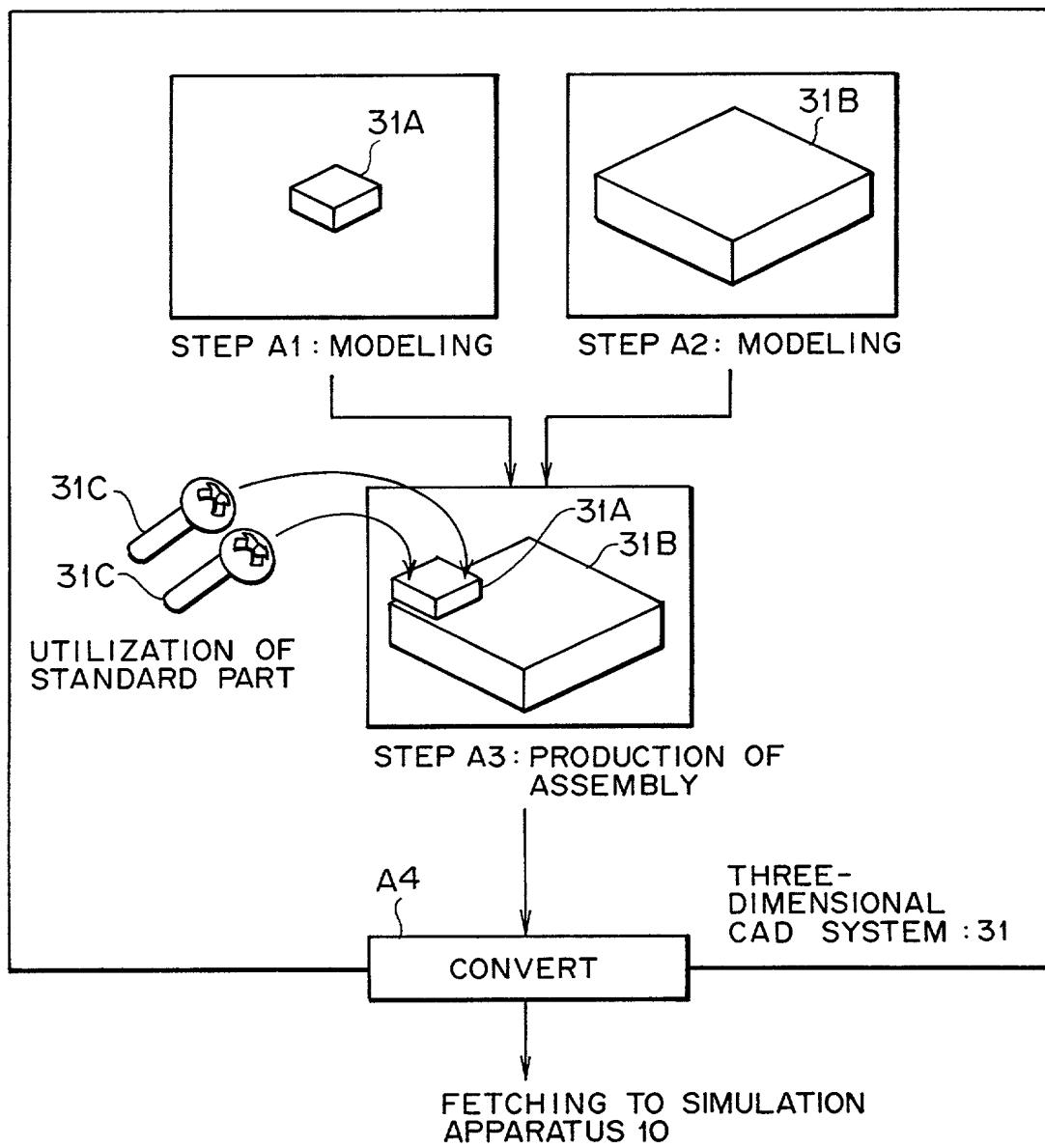


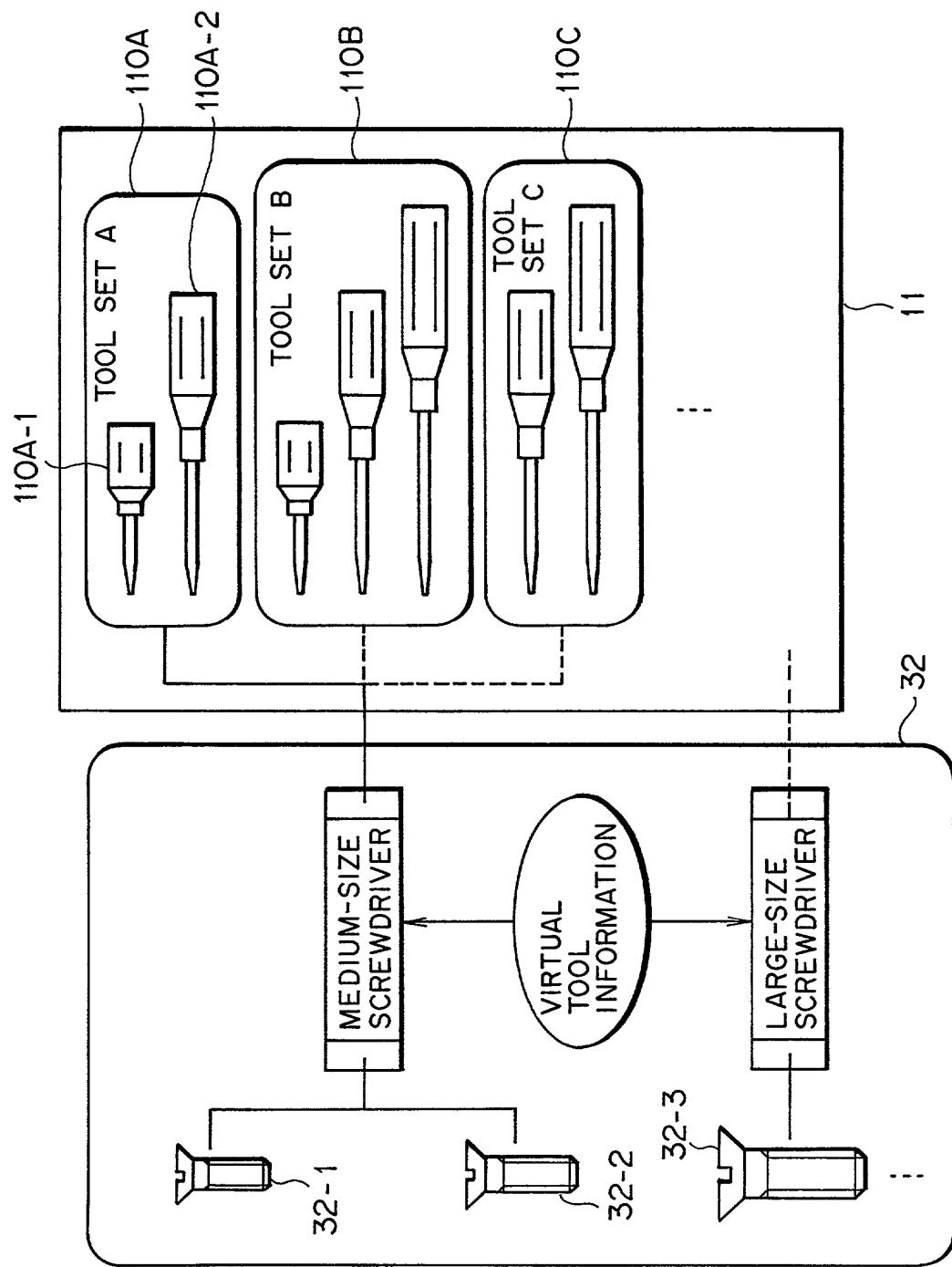
FIG. 3



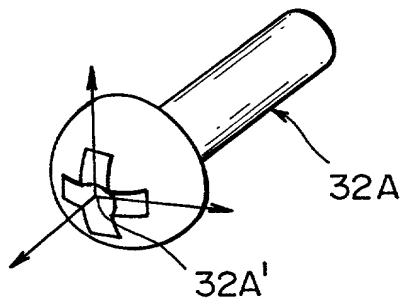
**FIG. 4**



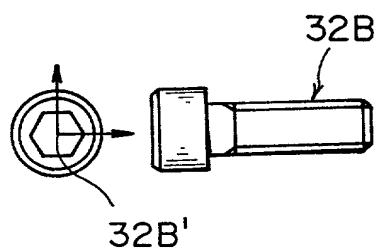
**FIG. 5**



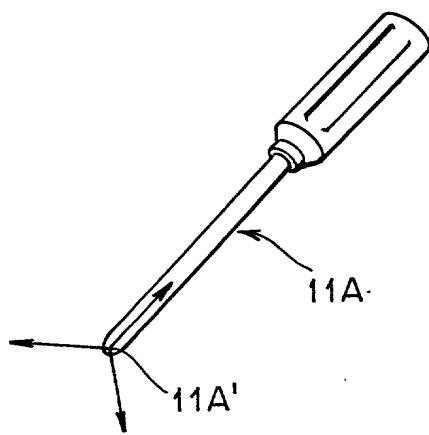
**F I G . 6**



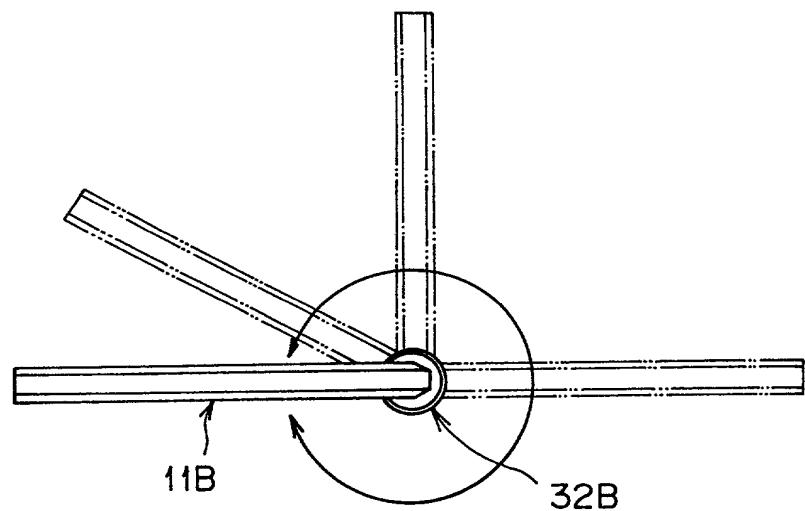
**F I G . 7**



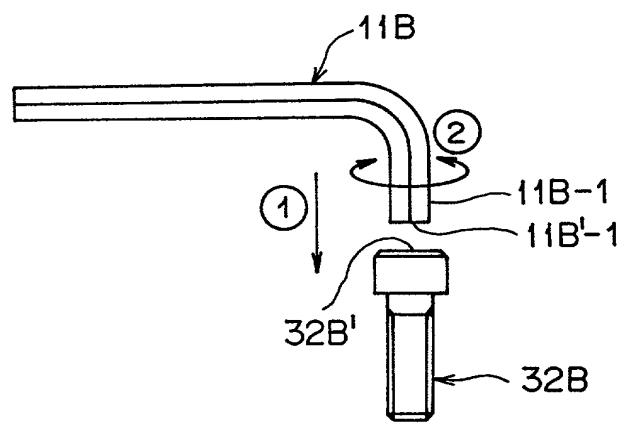
**F I G . 8**



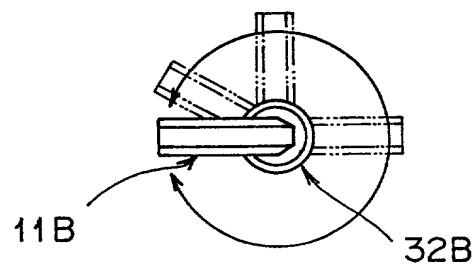
**F I G. 9A**



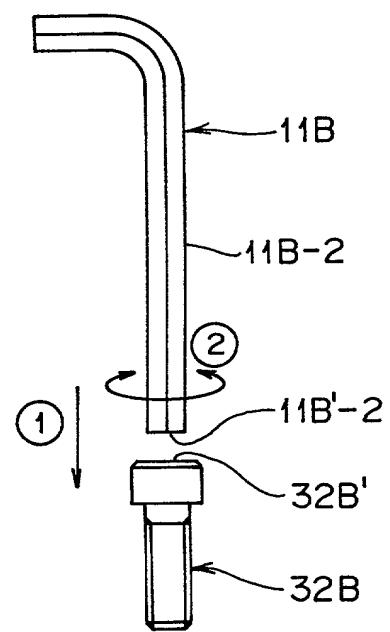
**F I G. 9B**



**FIG. 10A**



**FIG. 10B**



## FIG. II

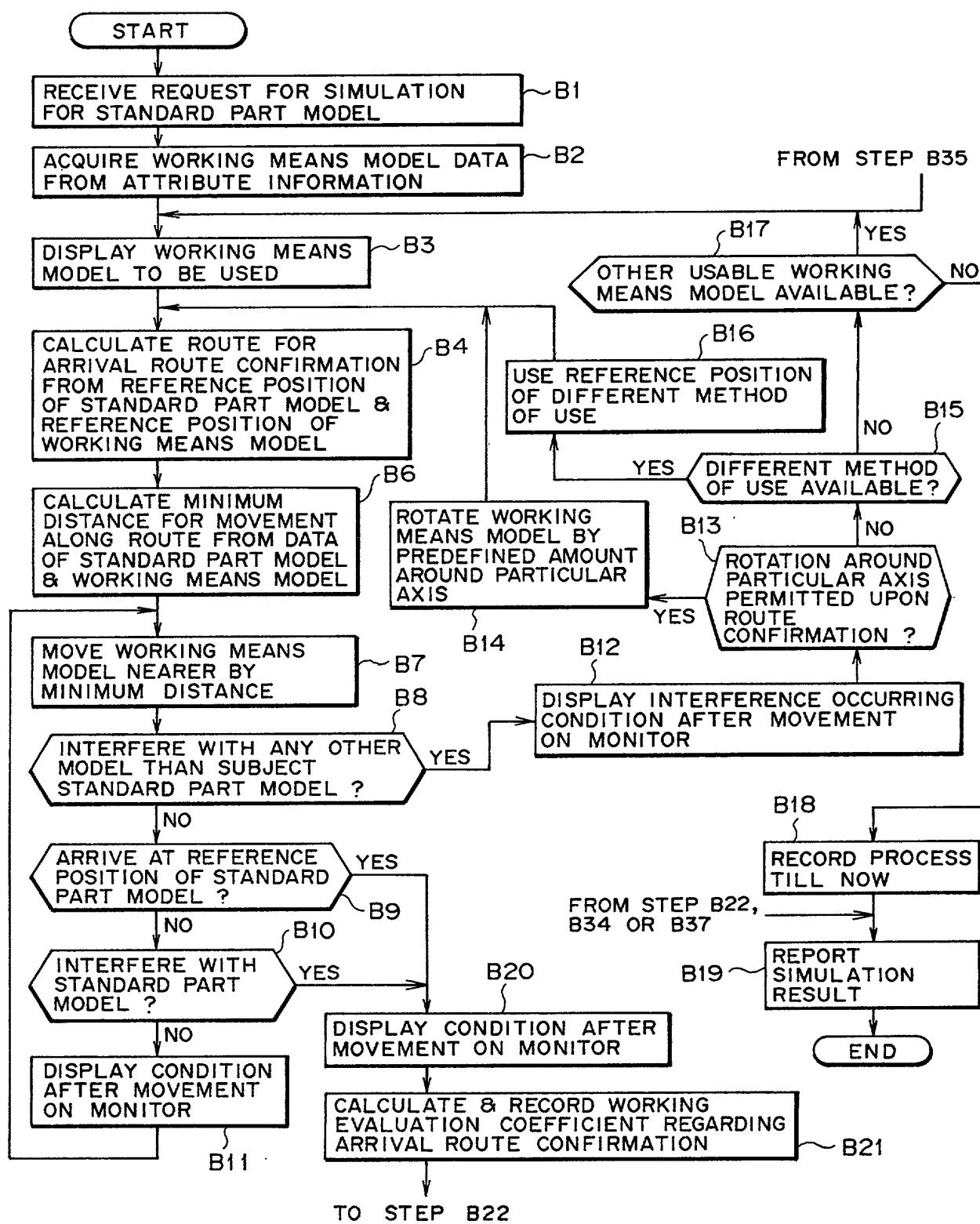
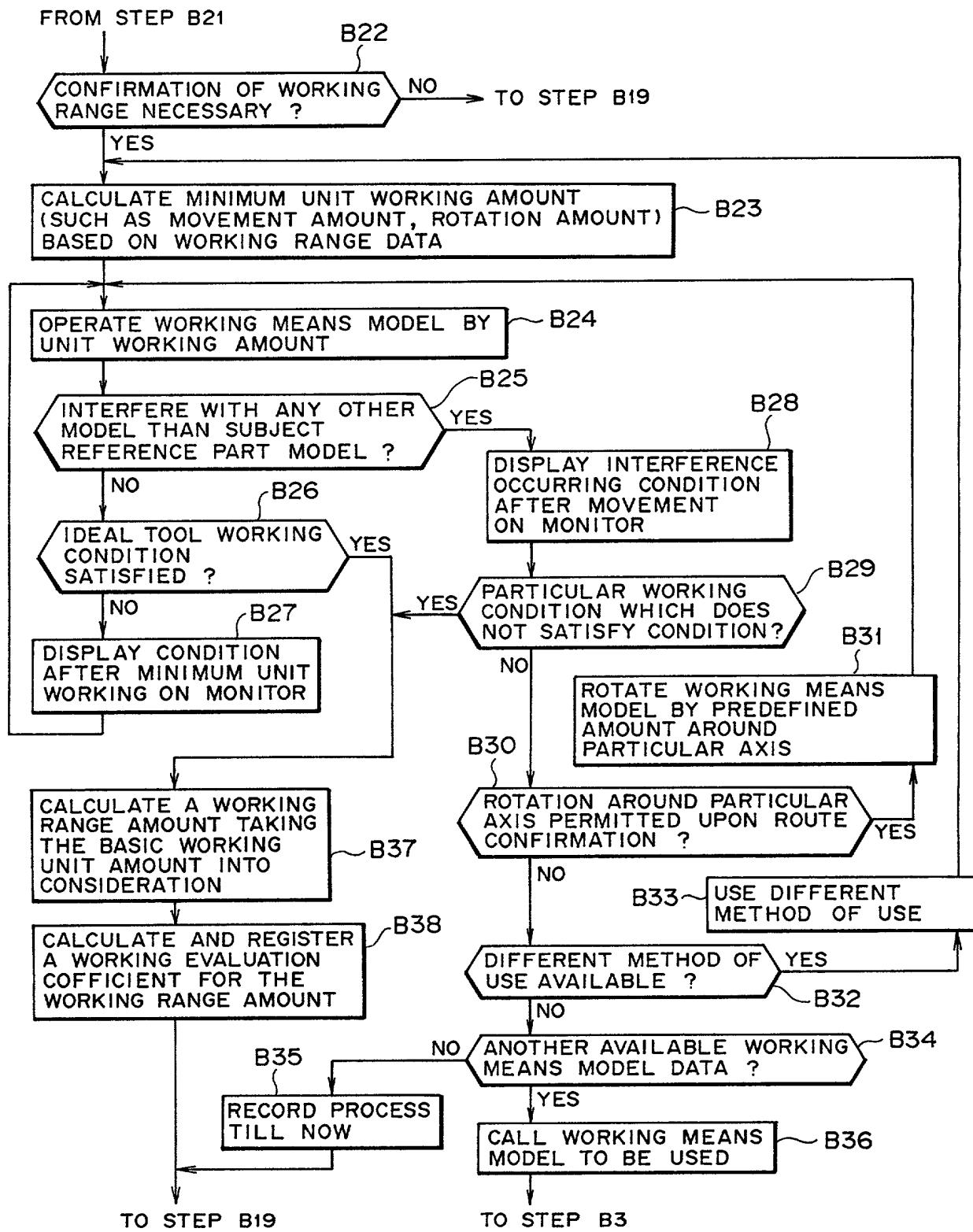


FIG. 12



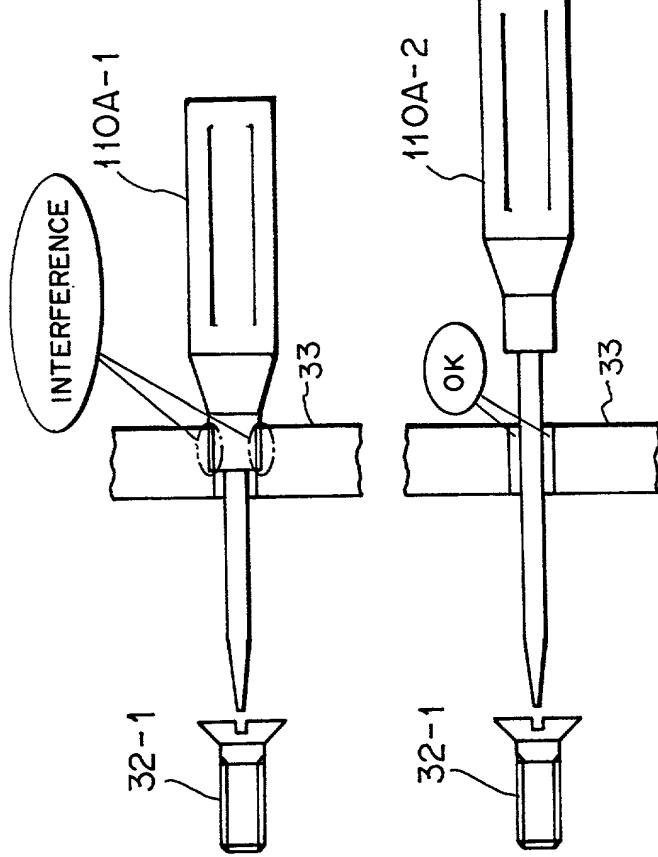
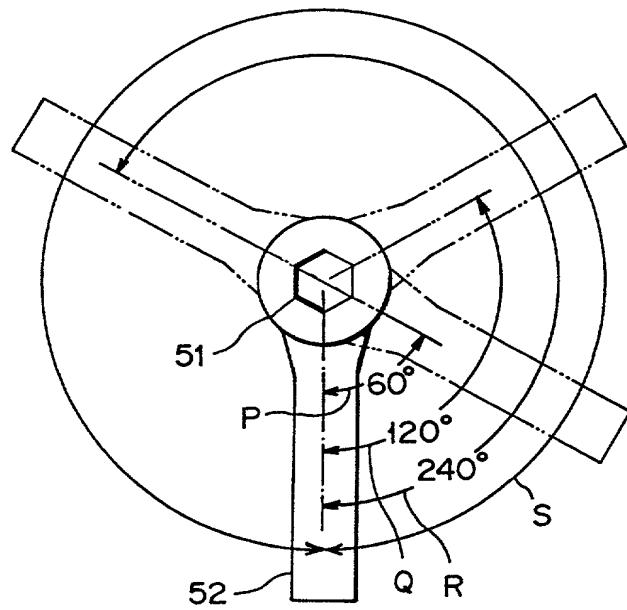


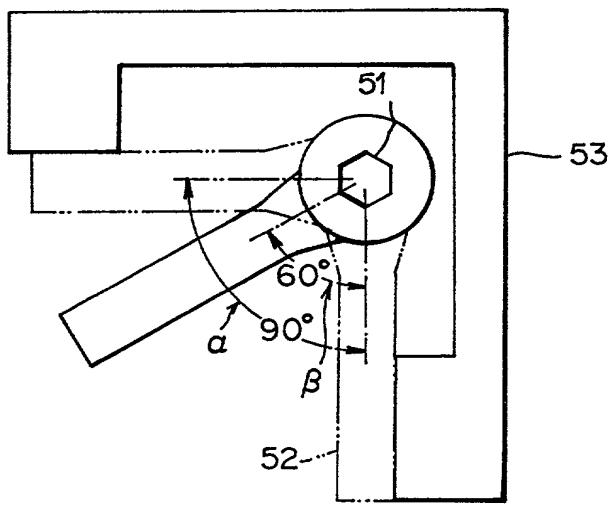
FIG. 13A

FIG. 13B

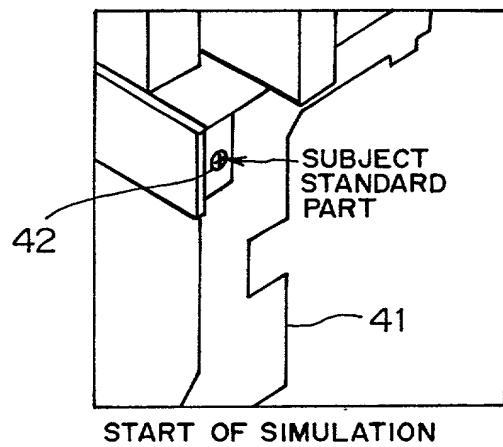
**FIG. 14**



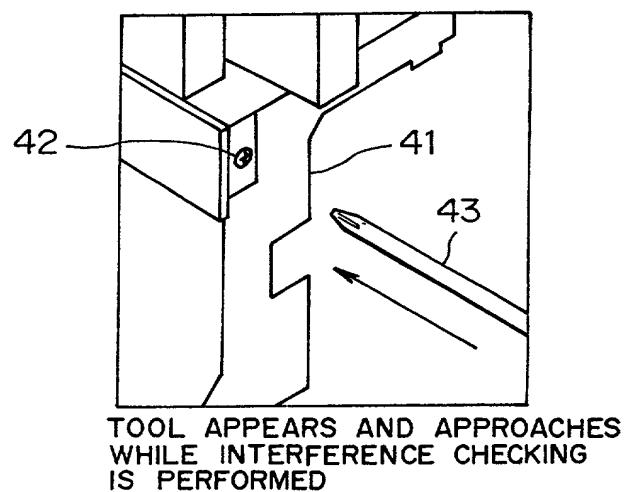
**FIG. 15**



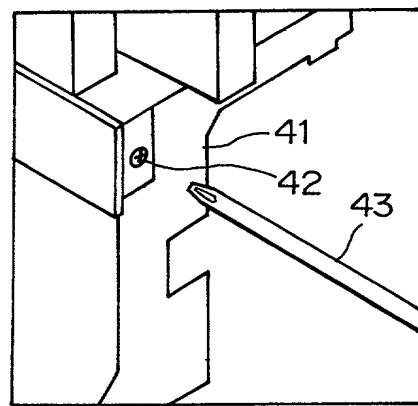
**FIG. 16**



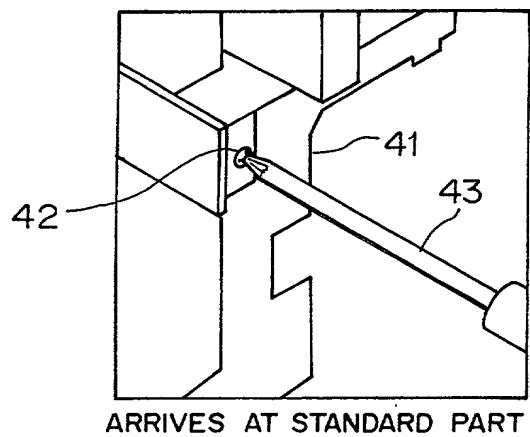
**FIG. 17**



**FIG. 18**

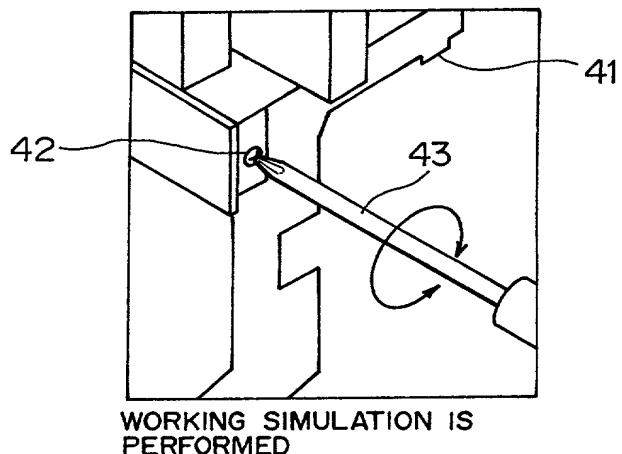


**FIG. 19**



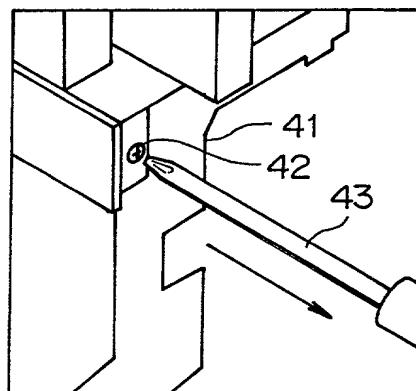
ARRIVES AT STANDARD PART

**FIG. 20**



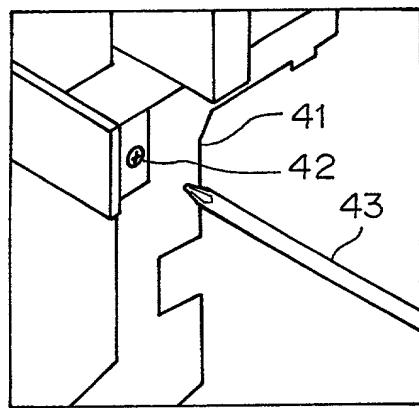
WORKING SIMULATION IS  
PERFORMED

**FIG. 21**

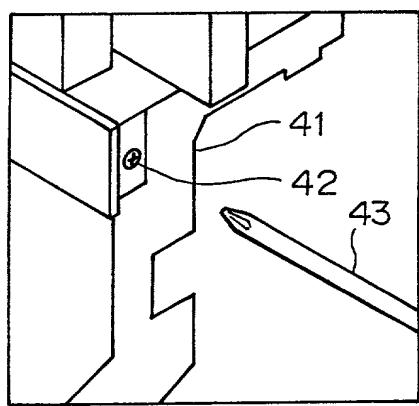


MOVES AWAY

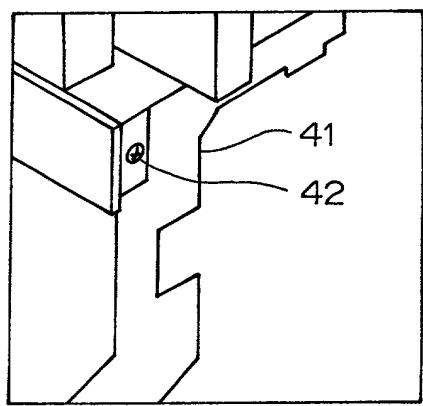
**FIG. 22**



**FIG. 23**

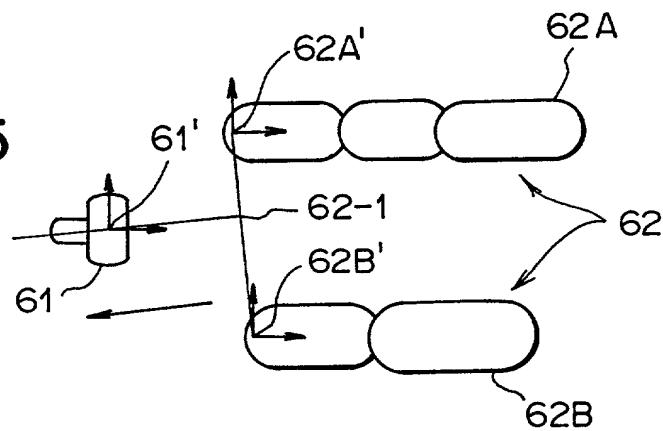


**FIG. 24**

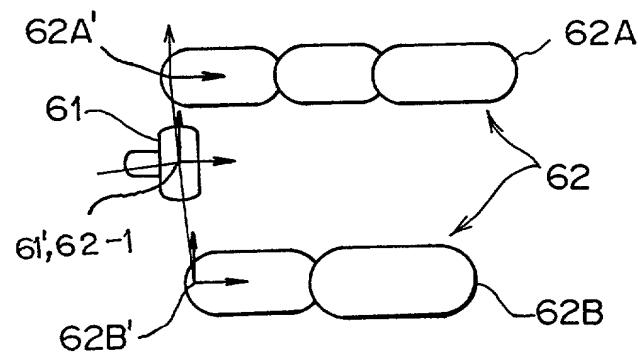


TOOL DISAPPEARS

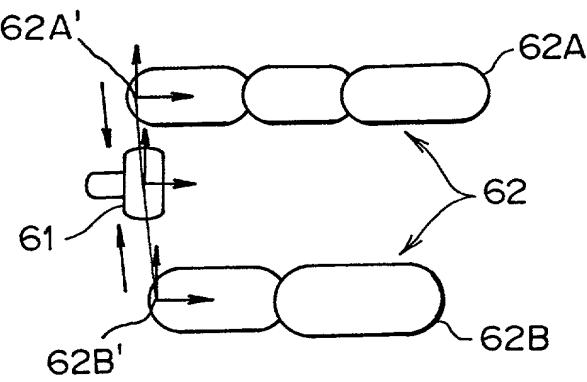
**FIG. 25**



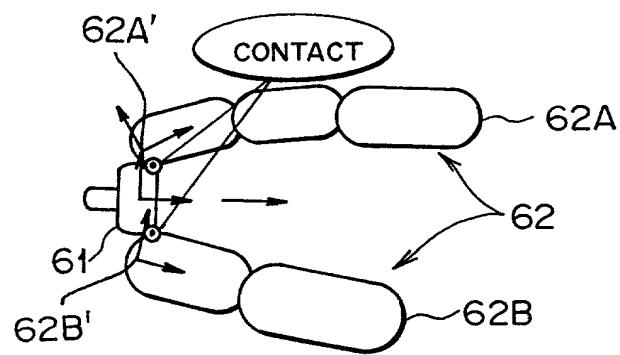
**FIG. 26**



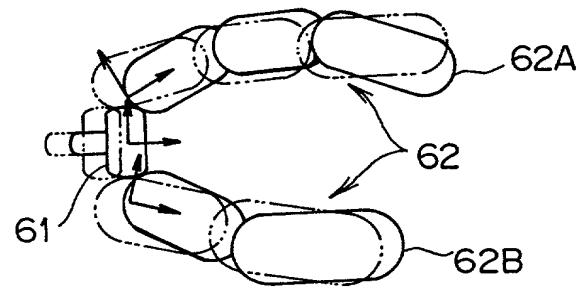
**FIG. 27**



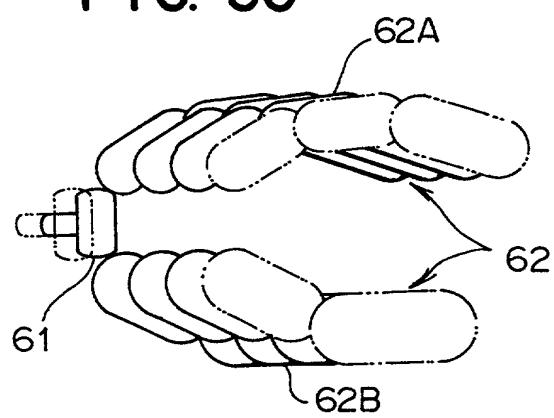
**FIG. 28**



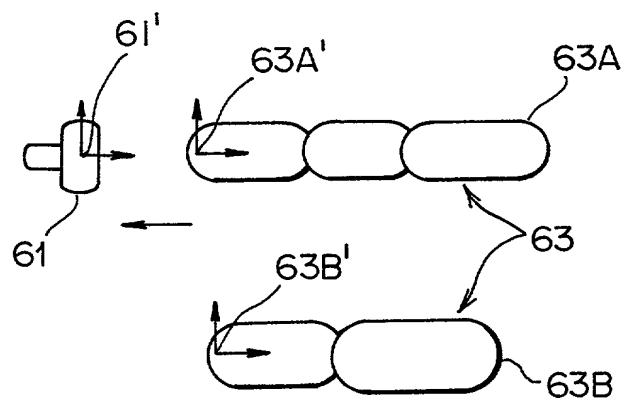
**FIG. 29**



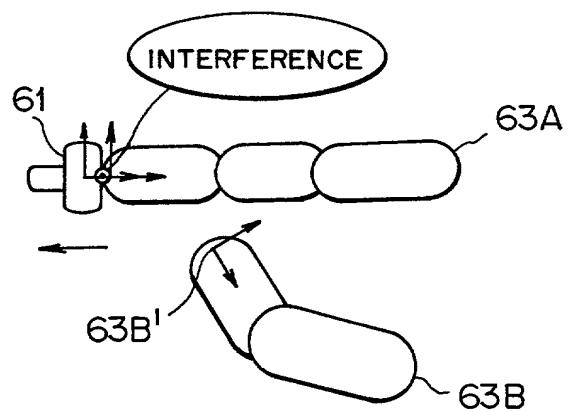
**FIG. 30**



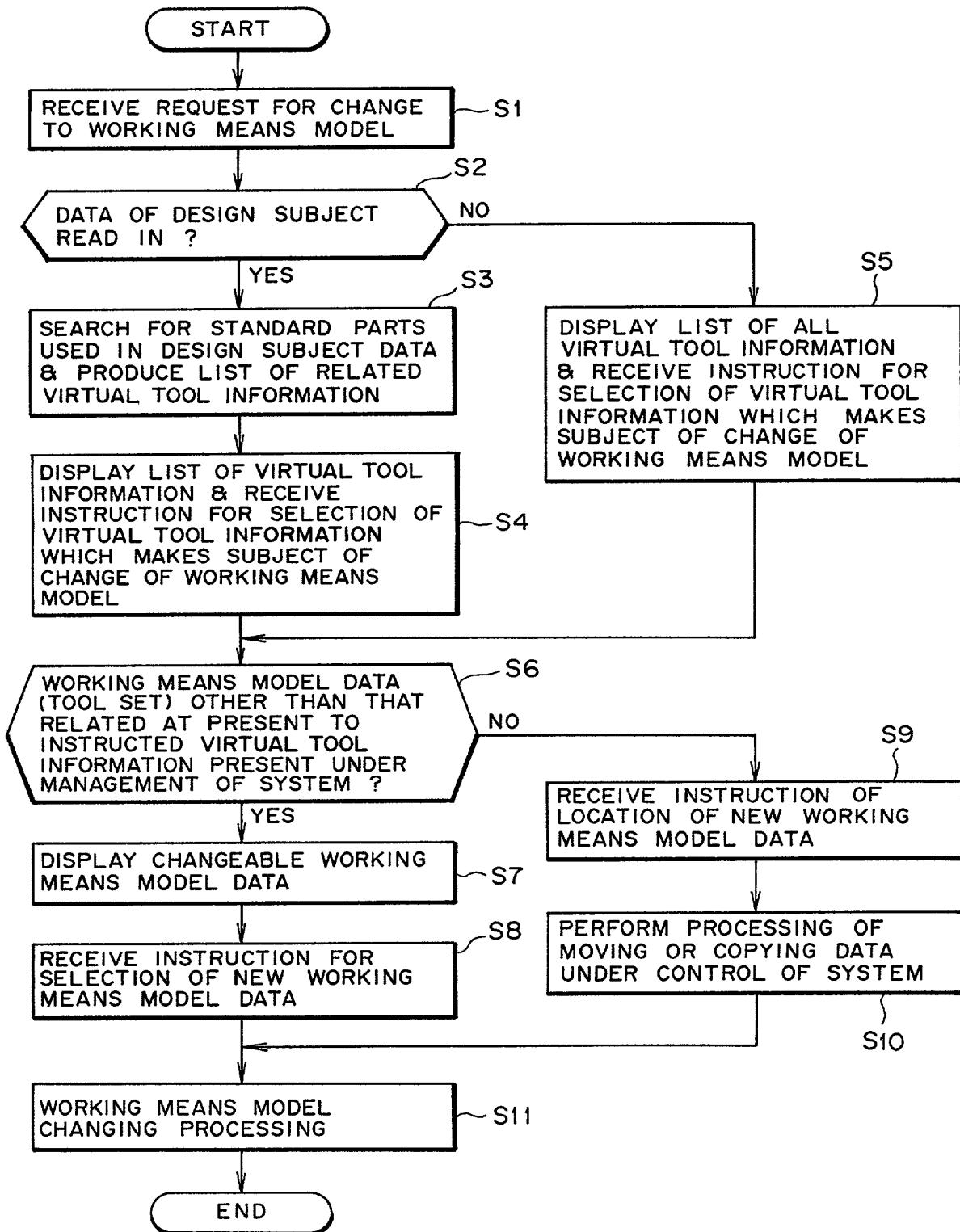
**FIG. 31**



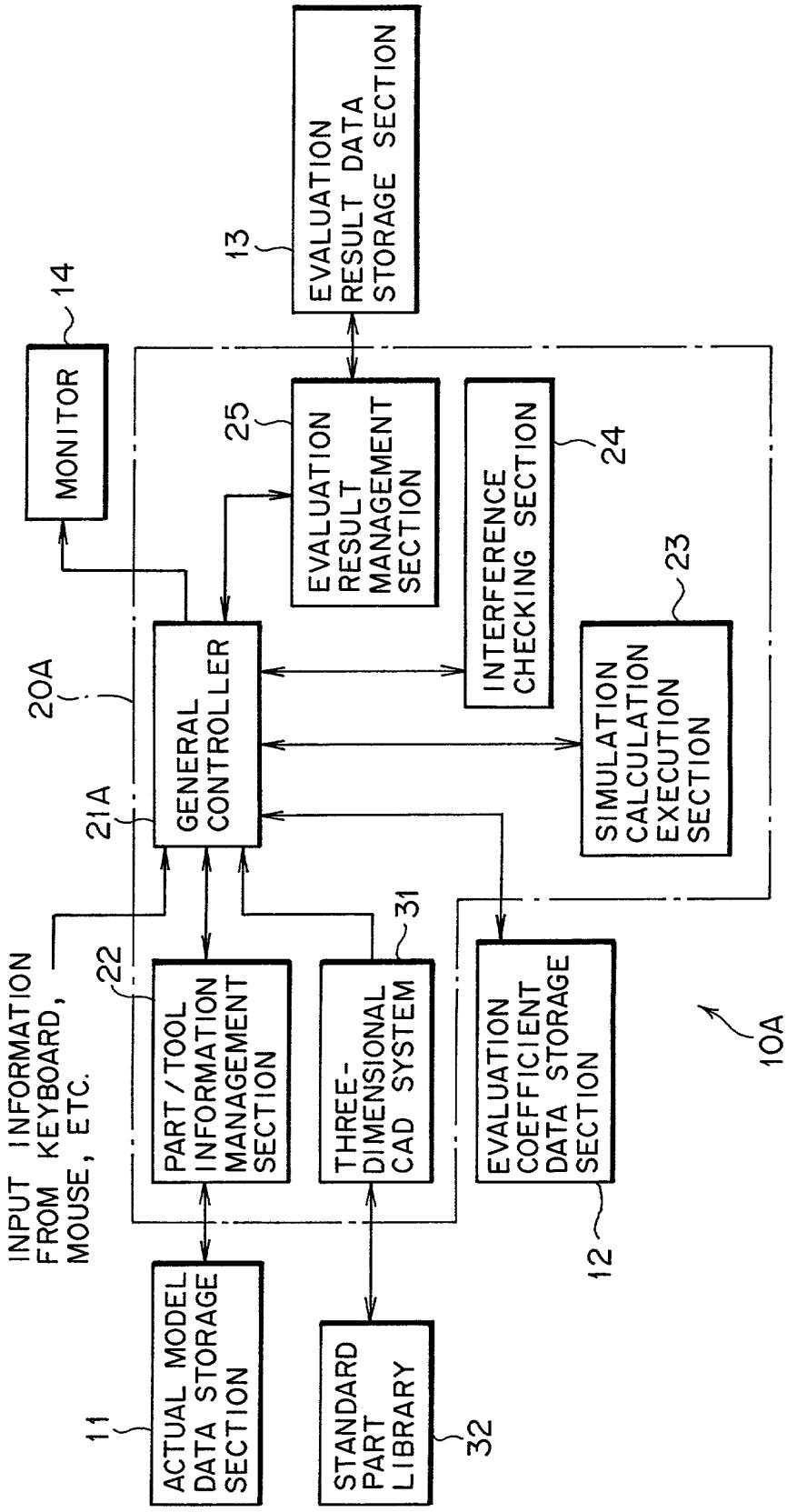
**FIG. 32**



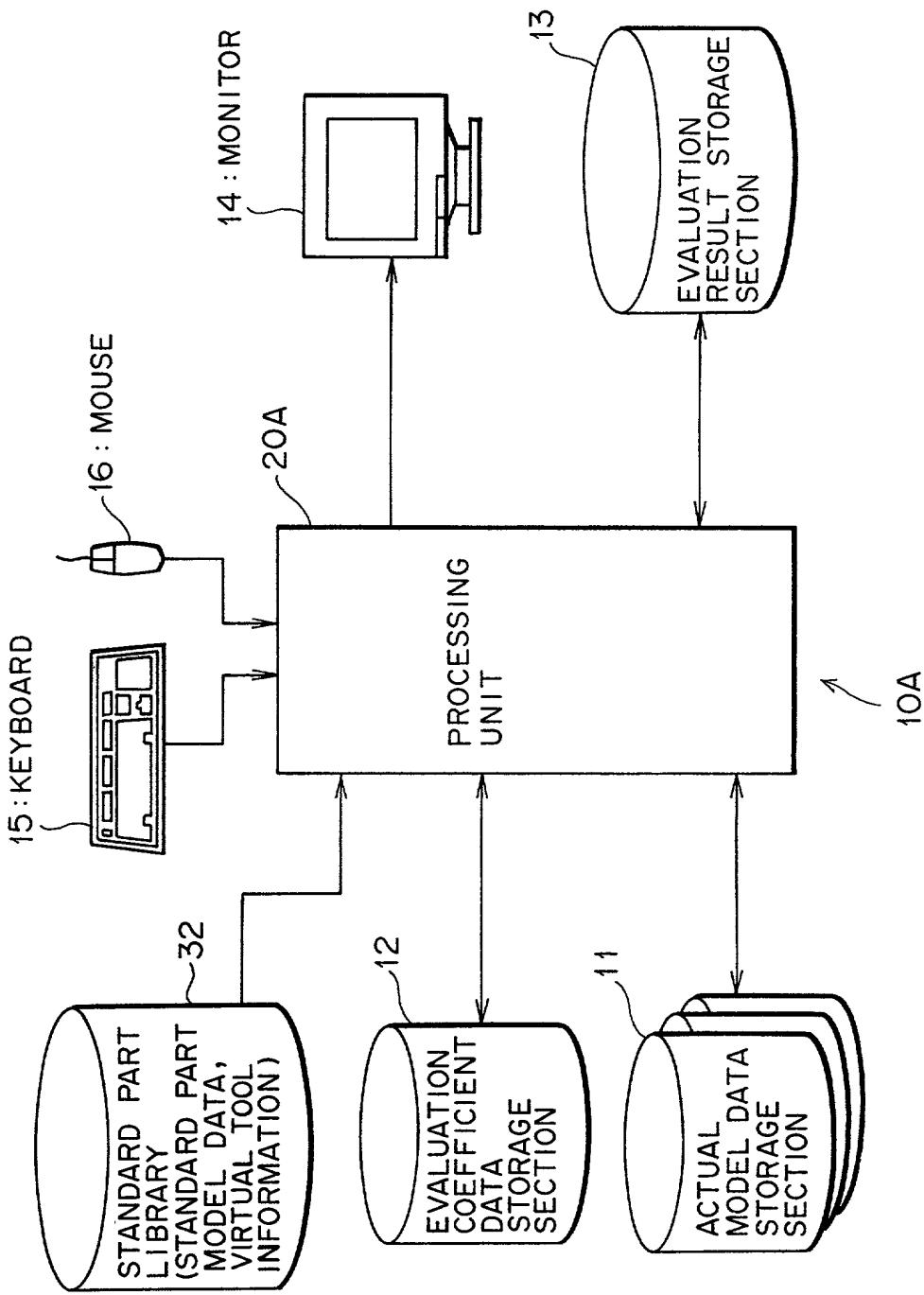
**FIG. 33**



**FIG. 34**



**FIG. 35**



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**Declaration and Power of Attorney For Patent Application****特許出願宣言書及び委任状****Japanese Language Declaration****日本語宣言書**

下記の氏名の発明者として、私は以下の通り宣言します。

As a below named Inventor, I hereby declare that:

私の住所、私書箱、国籍は下記の私の氏名の後に記載された通りです。

My residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated next to my name.

下記の名称の発明に関して請求範囲に記載され、特許出願している発明内容について、私が最初かつ唯一の発明者（下記の氏名が一つの場合）もしくは最初かつ共同発明者であると（下記の名称が複数の場合）信じています。

I believe I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or an original, first and joint inventor (if plural names are listed below) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled

SIMULATION APPARATUS, SIMULATION METHOD  
AND COMPUTER-READABLE RECORDING MEDIUM  
HAVING SIMULATION PROGRAM RECORDED  
THEREON AS WELL AS DESIGNING SUPPORTING  
APPARATUS

the specification of which is attached hereto unless the following box is checked:

一月\_\_\_\_日に提出され、米国出願番号または特許協定条約  
国際出願番号を\_\_\_\_\_とし。  
(該当する場合) \_\_\_\_\_に訂正されました。

was filed on \_\_\_\_\_  
as United States Application Number or  
PCT International Application Number  
\_\_\_\_\_ and was amended on  
\_\_\_\_\_ (If applicable).

私は、特許請求範囲を含む上記訂正後の明細書を検討し、内容を理解していることをここに表明します。

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above.

私は、連邦規則法典第37編第1条56項に定義されるおり、特許資格の有無について重要な情報を開示する義務があることを認めます。

I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 1.56.

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私は、米国法典第35編119条(a)-(d)項又は365条(b)項に基づき下記の、米国以外の国の少なくとも一ヵ国を指定している特許協力条約365(a)項に基づく国際出願、又は外国での特許出版もしくは発明者証の出版についての外国優先権をここに主張するとともに、優先権を主張している、本出願の前に出願された特許または発明者証の外国出願を以下に、枠内をマークすることで、示しています。

**Patent Application  
Prior Foreign Application(s)**

外国での先行出願

No. HEI 10-072900

(Number) (番号)	Japan (Country) (国名)
(Number) (番号)	(Country) (国名)

私は、第35編米国法典119条(e)項に基いて下記の米国特許出願規定に記載された権利をここに主張いたします。

(Application No.) (出願番号)	(Filing Date) (出願日)
-----------------------------	------------------------

私は、下記の米国法典第35編120条に基いて下記の米国特許出願に記載された権利、又は米国を指定している特許協力条約365条(c)に基づく権利をここに主張します。また、本出願の各請求範囲の内容が米国法典第35編112条第1項又は特許協力条約で規定された方法で先行する米国特許出願に開示されていない限り、その先行米国出願書提出日以降で本出願書の日本国内または特許協力条約国提出日までの期間中に入手された、連邦規則法典第37編1条56項で定義された特許資格の有無に関する重要な情報について開示義務があることを認識しています。

(Application No.) (出願番号)	(Filing Date) (出願日)
(Application No.) (出願番号)	(Filing Date) (出願日)

私は、私自身の知識に基づいて本宣言書中で私が行なう表明が真実であり、かつ私の入手した情報と私の信じるところに基づく表明が全て真実であると信じていること、さらに故意になされた虚偽の表明及びそれと同等の行為は米国法典第18編第1001条に基づき、罰金または拘禁、もしくはその両方により処罰されること、そしてそのような故意による虚偽の声明を行なえば、出願した、又は既に許可された特許の有効性が失われることを認識し、よってここに上記のごく直筆を致します。

I hereby claim foreign priority under Title 35, United States Code, Section 119 (a)-(d) or 365(b) of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate, or 365(a) of any PCT International application which designated at least one country other than the United States, listed below and have also identified below, by checking the box, any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate, or PCT International application having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed.

**Priority Not Claimed**  
優先権主張なし

20/03/1998 (Day/Month/Year Filed) (出願年月日)	<input type="checkbox"/>
(Day/Month/Year Filed) (出願年月日)	<input type="checkbox"/>

I hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code, Section 119(e) of any United States provisional application(s) listed below.

(Application No.) (出願番号)	(Filing Date) (出願日)
-----------------------------	------------------------

I hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code, Section 120 of any United States application(s), or 365(c) of any PCT International application designating the United States, listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States or PCT International application in the manner provided by the first paragraph of Title 35, United States Code Section 112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 1.56 which became available between the filing date of the prior application and the national or PCT International filing date of application.

(Status: Patented, Pending, Abandoned) (現況: 特許許可済、係属中、放棄済)	<input type="checkbox"/>
(Status: Patented, Pending, Abandoned) (現況: 特許許可済、係属中、放棄済)	<input type="checkbox"/>

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

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## Japanese Language Declaration (日本語宣言書)

委任状： 私は下記の発明者として、本出願に関する一切の手続を米特許商標局に対して遂行する弁理士または代理人として、下記の者を指名いたします。（弁護士、または代理人の氏名及び登録番号を明記のこと）

James D. Halsey, Jr., 22,729; Harry John Staas, 22,010; David M. Pitcher, 25,908; John C. Garvey, 28,607; J. Randall Beckers, 30,358; William F. Herbert, 31,024; Richard A. Gollhofer, 31,106; Mark J. Henry, 36,162; Gene M. Garner II, 34,172; Michael D. Stein, 37,240; Paul I. Kravetz, 35,230; Gerald P. Joyce, III, 37,648; Todd E. Marlette, 35,269; Harlan B. Williams, Jr., 34,756; George N. Stevens, 36,938; Michael C. Soldner, 41,455; Norman L. Ourada, 41,235; Kevin R. Spivak, P-43,148; and William M. Schertler, 35,348 (agent)

書類送付先

**POWER OF ATTORNEY:** As a named Inventor, I hereby appoint the following attorney(s) and/or agent(s) to prosecute this application and transact all business in the Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith (list name and registration number)

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700 Eleventh Street, N.W.  
Suite 500  
Washington, D.C. 20001

直接電話連絡先：（名前及び電話番号）

**Direct Telephone Call to: (name and telephone number)**

STAAS & HALSEY  
(202) 434-1500

唯一または第一発明者名		Full name of sole or first inventor	
		Yuichi ARITA	
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		February 25, 1999	
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国籍	Citizenship		
Japanese			
私書箱	Post Office Address		
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4-chome, Nakahara-ku, Kawasaki-shi,			
Kanagawa 211-8588, Japan			
第二共同発明者		Full name of second joint inventor, if any	
第二共同発明者		Second inventor's signature	Date
住所	Residence		
国籍	Citizenship		
私書箱	Post Office Address		

（第三以降の共同発明者についても同様に記載し、署名をすること） (Supply similar information and signature for third and subsequent joint inventors.)